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2001 RECRUITS

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FROM THE EDITOR

Recruiting Ends; Baseball Begins

Two late additions cap successful recruiting year



**Brian
HILL**

NEBRASKA'S LATEST recruiting class was signed and sealed the morning of Wednesday, Feb. 7, before freezing rain hit the Lincoln area that night.

By Friday, the day the Huskers opened their 2001 baseball season, nine inches of snow blanketed

Nebraska's capital city. Luckily, Coach Dave Van Horn's Huskers were some 800 miles to the south, playing in the Rice Invitational.

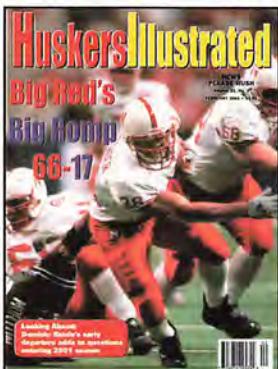
The Huskers finished 1-2, including a loss to top-rated Georgia Tech, but that wasn't bad for the first games of the season. And Nebraska hadn't exactly had baseball weather back to practice in back home.

Top five preseason ratings and a new ballpark going up west of Memorial Stadium have people talking baseball. Contributing writer Curt McKeever has a look at the 2001 Huskers in "From the Beat" on Page 11.

Of course, signing day certainly didn't go unnoticed, especially with the late addition of a pair of highly regarded recruits to the Husker class. Speedy running back Marques Simmons of Davenport, Iowa, and defensive lineman Le Kevin Smith of Macon, Ga., kept everyone in suspense right down to signing day.

Those late additions completed what could be the best of Frank Solich's four recruiting classes. The Huskers emphasized defense. Of the 18 players signed, 11 were recruited as defensive players, including six defensive backs and four defensive line candidates.

Our recruiting package includes a signing day report, a look back at this year's



recruiting process, capsules and photos of the recruiting class and a look at the classes of all Big 12 schools. Contributing editor Mike Babcock has a special feature on the Ruud family. Current recruit Barrett follows his father, Tom, who was a linebacker at Nebraska from 1972-74.

We'd like to thank everyone — athletes, parents, coaches, administrators, newspapers, etc. — who helped us track down photos of members of the recruiting class. We always hope to get them all, but it doesn't always work out that way.

Speaking of how things play out ... As usual, Nebraska's recruiting class is not listed among the leaders in the rankings of the so-called recruiting experts. Most of them have Nebraska no higher than 10th, although SuperPrep's Allen Wallace does list NU seventh.

All you have to do is remember that many of Nebraska's recruiting classes that led to national championships weren't that well thought of either. Time will tell.

We didn't forget about the current Huskers, with a look at the passing statistics of 2000 compared to those in recent years. Senior-to-be Eric Crouch expects his numbers to be better with a healthy shoulder.

We also have a look at Nebraska's men's and women's basketball teams, as well as features on the swimming and track teams.

We'd like to welcome Terry Douglass to our group of regular contributors. Douglass, the sports editor of the Grand Island Independent, will fill the regular spot previously occupied by Bob Schaller. We thank Bob for his contributions during the last two years.

In our next issue, we'll look ahead to spring practice, and we'll update the progress of the baseball team.

The snow should be melted by then. ■

ON THE COVER

Nebraska's recruiting class includes Nebraska high school products Barrett Ruud of Lincoln Southeast (47), Seppo Evvaraye of Laurel-Concord (77) and Titus Adams (78) of Omaha Creighton Prep. Photos, design by Scott Bruhn

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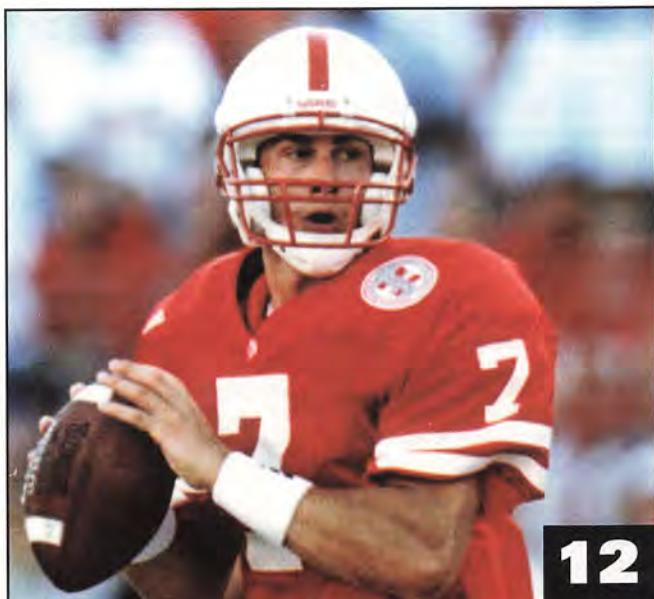
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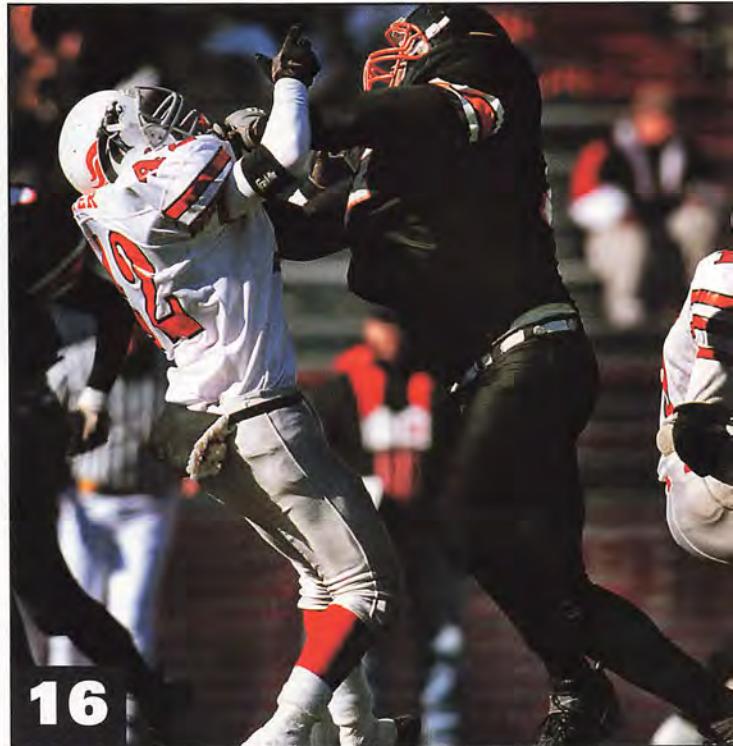
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This Is Only a Test

Testing? Willie Amos could do without it.

"To me, personally, I don't believe in testing," the freshman safety said following the Nebraska football team's pre-winter conditioning program testing in mid-January.

"Every time I hear the word 'test,' I don't test well."

Apparently, Amos didn't hear the word "test" beforehand because he scored well in the four tests: the 10-yard and 40-yard dashes, the vertical jump and the pro agility drill. He had the third-best total on the performance index, determined by factoring an athlete's size into his test scores.

Sophomore defensive tackle Jon Clanton was first on the performance index; freshman linebacker Jason Richenberger finished second. The 6-foot-2, 277-pound Clanton was "the story of the pre-testing," said Boyd Epley, the Cornhuskers' director of athletic performance.

Epley's assessment was based not only on Clanton's point total on the performance index but also on the 1,018 performance points he scored by running the pro agility drill in 3.97 seconds.

No one had ever earned 1,000 performance points for a test score.

"I'm a little surprised but not shocked by it," Epley said.

Clanton already held the position record in the pro agility drill.

"It was just a great effort. It's quite an honor, really, too," said Epley. "Look at all the athletes we've tested over the years; the first one to ever go over a thousand is something we won't forget."

Amos didn't come close to 1,000 performance points in any of his tests. But he was the first to run a 40-yard dash in under 4.5 seconds on Nebraska's two-year-old FieldTurf surface.

Amos, who played this season on special teams and as a back-up without redshirting, ran the second of his two 40-yard dashes in 4.45 seconds, "very impressive," Epley said.

"Anything under 4.5 is outstanding, on any surface."

The NFL, according to Epley, categorizes a FieldTurf surface as natural grass, and electronic times on natural grass are slower than times on artificial turf. "So this is like comparing grass



Willie Amos



Jon Clanton

times to Astroturf times," said Epley. "People across the nation who read our electronic times don't realize that."

"So they are thinking Nebraska is slow, and always have. That's just fine with us. We've always been seen as a team that was big and strong and slow. But I promise you, we are not slow."

Four linebackers were among the eight players with the fastest 10-yard dash times in the testing: Randy Stella, Lannie Hopkins, Richenberger and Matt Albertson.

Hopkins and Richenberger also ranked among the fastest in the 40-yard dash.

"We have some speed at linebacker; that's for sure," Epley said.

Nebraska only tests players in the 40-yard dash, the most popular way of evaluating speed, during the off-season because of the potential for injury, particularly hamstring pulls. A player reaches top speed at about 28 to 30 yards and that's when there's the greatest risk, according to Epley.

That risk doesn't exist when running the 10-yard dash. "We've never had an injury (at 10 yards)," said Epley. And "it still gives us a good read on what a person's speed is."

Nebraska's 40 times tend to be slower than those at other schools because of its electronic timing system. Many schools rely on hand-held times. The accepted method for converting an electronic time to an equivalent hand-held time is to subtract .2 of a second from the hand-held time. "For a lineman, it might be (to subtract) .24. For a speedster, wide receiver-type, defensive back-type, it might be .16. There's really not an exact number, so we don't worry about it. The fact of the matter is, the electronic time is what you ran. That is the most accurate way to do this."

A 4.5-second time determined electronically would be comparable to a 4.3 hand-held time.

"But it's different for the bigger people than the smaller," Epley said.

Former Cornhusker I-backs Keith Jones and Ahman Green both ran the 40 in 4.33 seconds electronically. Former wingback Dana Brinson's best was 4.37.

Amos ran the 40 in 4.45 seconds despite being unfamiliar with the all-important starting technique. "I need practice on that," he said, after getting some help from cornerback Erwin Swiney.

Amos showed "unbelievable acceleration," said Epley. "He may be as fast as we've seen on the team in the middle of a run like that. He has tremendous closing speed for his position."

"You'll be able to see that out on the field."

Amos also ranked among the leaders in the vertical jump, 36.5 inches. But again, he was more concerned about technique. "I guess I'm just going to have to work on that," he said. "I just like to get things done right before I actually do the whole thing. I really hate messing up and doing something that's bad. Everybody thinks it's good, but to me it's bad."

That was certainly the case with his 40-yard dash time.

But "the time is insignificant to me," Amos said. "I still don't like the way I did it. I don't know; people always ask me how were my stats in football. I wouldn't know."

"I just don't pay attention to those things."

He doesn't like to test. And "I don't like being in the limelight," he said.

PRE-WINTER TESTING RESULTS

Performance Index Points		40-yard Dash Points	
Jon Clanton DL	2,648	Richenberger	4.60
Jason Richenberger LB	2,477	Hemje	4.60
Willie Amos DB	2,449	Ben Zajicek WR	4.60
Curt Tomasevicz FB	2,421		
Chris Kelsay RE	2,412		

10-yard Dash (seconds)

Randy Stella LB	1.56	Amos	775
Jeff Hemje DB	1.56	Richenberger	723
Lannie Hopkins LB	1.57	Hopkins	684
Richenberger	1.59		
Sandro DeAngelis K-P	1.59		
DeWayne Long WR	1.59		
Matt Albertson LB	1.59		
Joel Jackson DB	1.59		

Pro Agility Run (seconds)

Carl Scholting DB	3.89
Jack O'Holleran IB	3.94
Hemje	3.94
Clanton	3.97

Pro Agility Run Points

Clanton	1,018
Justin Smith RE	756
Scholting	705

Vertical Jump (inches)

Tomasevicz	37
Amos	36.5
Tim Demerath DB	35.5

40-yard Dash

Amos	4.45	Tomasevicz	677
Hopkins	4.58	Amos	619
Erwin Swiney DB	4.58	Demerath	612

Vertical Jump Points

PERFORMANCE INDEX T-SHIRTS

Epley and his staff award t-shirts to players who score 500 or more performance points in each of the four conditioning tests. They gave out eight t-shirts after the tests in mid-January.

In addition to Curt Tomasevicz, Jason Richenberger, Chris Kelsay, Justin Smith, Demoine Adams, Ben Zajicek, Jack O'Holleran and Stuart Siegel received the t-shirts.

O'Holleran, Siegel and Tomasevicz are walk-ons. ■

WHO'S HE?

Curt Tomasevicz broke the record at his position for vertical jump performance points, earning 677 by jumping a team-high 37 inches in pre-winter conditioning testing.

Tomasevicz, a 6-foot, 214-pound full-back, is a freshman walk-on from Shelby, Neb.

"He's a kid you're going to see move up the charts in the spring," said Boyd Epley, director of athletic performance. "The coaches are going to be watching him a little closer. He's done well in practices on the scout team. They're pleased with where he's at and the power he brings to the position."

The vertical jump is a measure of explosiveness. "He's always been very explosive," Epley said.

Brandon Biodrowski also is explosive, based on his 37.5-inch vertical jump.

Biodrowski, an aspiring defensive back from Fort Calhoun, Neb., was among several athletes who participated in the testing in hopes of being invited to walk on in spring practice.

He had the day's best vertical jump, but non-team members' scores were kept separate.

The 5-foot-10, 187-pound Biodrowski "really did a great job, and I think he deserves to have his name mentioned," said Epley. Biodrowski ran the 10-yard dash in 1.57 seconds, the 40-yard dash in 4.58 seconds and the pro agility drill in 4.19 seconds. His performance points totaled 2,318.

That was "about as good as you could expect for someone that's trying out," Epley said.

Athletes must first earn a place in the winter conditioning class, which includes mostly football players. Then they can be invited to participate in spring practice.

Approximately 16 of 60 hopefuls qualified for the conditioning class.

RIMINGTON AWARD

The winner of the first Dave Rimington Trophy for college football's center of the year was to be presented in February. The trophy is sponsored by the Boomer Esiason Foundation.

Dominic Raiola, who is forgoing his senior season at Nebraska in order to submit his name for the NFL draft, and Minnesota's Ben Hamilton were the leading contenders for the award, which is based on the number of All-America teams a player makes — and in the event of a tie, on grade-point average.

The award was established to raise money for the foundation's fight against cystic fibrosis. Rimington, Esiason's teammate on the Cincinnati Bengals from 1984 to 1987 and a two-time consensus All-America center at Nebraska, is president of the New York City-based foundation.

"There are quite a few awards out there already," Rimington, an Omaha native, told the Omaha World-Herald. "But there's definitely a place for an award for centers."

He was the only two-time winner of the Outland Trophy, in 1981 and 1982, and also won the Lombardi Award in 1982. He was one of just two centers ever to win the Outland — North Carolina State's Jim Richter was the other in 1979 — and the only center ever to win the Lombardi. ■

QUICK HITS

What's Happening In Nebraska Athletics?

STAFF REMAINS INTACT

Coaching staff stability has been a significant element of the continuing success of the Nebraska football program. Concern for maintaining that stability was a factor in Tom Osborne's decision to step aside as head coach following the 1997 national championship season.

Coach Frank Solich and his assistants have a combined 132 seasons at Nebraska. That total would have been diminished after the Alamo Bowl game if receivers coach Ron Brown had decided to continue to pursue an assistant's position with the Kansas City Chiefs.

Brown, who has been on the Cornhusker staff for 14 years, interviewed with Dick Vermeil, the Chiefs' new head coach, in mid-January before announcing he would remain at Nebraska.

Brown made the announcement following the Cornhuskers' basketball game against Texas.

"I believe this is God's will for me and my family," he said in a brief news conference at the Devaney Sports Center. "I love the state of Nebraska, and I love its people."

Quarterbacks coach Turner Gill talked to Missouri officials in late November regarding the Tigers' head coaching position, which was subsequently filled by Toledo's Gary Pinkel.

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

Because of the possibility of advancing to the Big 12 championship game, Nebraska decided against adding a 12th football game to its 2001 schedule. The Cornhuskers considered making a fourth appearance in the Kickoff Classic, to the point of talking to officials of the late-August game.

After breaking off discussions with Kickoff Classic officials, Nebraska Athletic Director Bill Byrne indicated that he and Coach Frank Solich were concerned about extending the season because of the wear and tear on players, as well as the additional risk of injury.

If the Cornhuskers were to play in a preseason game such as the Kickoff Classic and then advance to the conference playoff, they could end up with a 14-game season including a bowl.

"We think the 14th game is just too much," Byrne told the Lincoln Journal Star. As it stands now, Nebraska will open at home against Troy State on Sept. 1.

NO THURSDAY NIGHT LIGHTS

The Nebraska-Missouri football game at Columbia won't be moved from Saturday, Sept. 29, to Thursday night, Sept. 27, for a national cable telecast on Fox Sports Net.

The network discussed the possibility with Nebraska and Missouri officials, but Missouri apparently nixed the switch for what reportedly were concerns of Columbia-area businesses.

The reasoning was, a Saturday game would generate more revenue.

ENROLLED, AT LAST

Mania Brown, a member of the Cornhuskers' 2000 recruiting class, enrolled for second semester after meeting the standardized test score required for eligibility by the NCAA.

Brown, a 6-foot-4, 280-pound rush end from Salt Lake City, was a partial qualifier and could have enrolled in the fall, but he elected to preserve a season of eligibility by waiting.

He'll go through spring practice and be a true freshman in the fall.

SENIOR AWARDS

Russ Hochstein was this year's winner of the Nebraska football team's Native Son Award. The award has been presented since 1991, in honor of long-time Cornhusker assistant Clete Fischer.

Fischer, who also played at Nebraska, died in December.

Hochstein was an offensive lineman from Hartington, Neb.

Troy Watchorn, a walk-on safety from Columbus, Neb., received the Tom Novak Award and Dan Alexander, an I-back from Wentzville, Mo., received the Guy Chamberlin Award.

SCHOOL RECORD

Freshman Alecia Ingram earned top-two finishes in all four events, as the ninth-ranked Nebraska women's gymnastics team topped the 197-point plateau for the first time in school history with a 197.025-194.425 victory over Missouri Jan. 28 in Columbia, Mo.

Ingram's performance propelled the Huskers to their record-setting outing, as NU broke the previous school record of 196.875 set twice last season. ■

Attracting Attention

Husker backup I-back Buckhalter impressive in NFL audition



Mike Babcock

"Since quality RBs tend to drop down the draft board, don't be surprised if Buckhalter becomes a major steal in the early-to-mid second day."

Mel Kiper, ESPN.com

MUCH CAN HAPPEN between now and late April, when the National Football League conducts its annual draft. But former Nebraska I-back Correll Buckhalter's prospects look good.

Even though Buckhalter labored as a backup during most of his Cornhusker career, he has attracted the attention of NFL talent scouts and draft analysts such as ESPN's Kiper.

Buckhalter was tied with Michigan's Anthony Thomas for fifth on Kiper's list of draft-eligible running backs following the East-West Shrine game in San Francisco in mid-January.

Mississippi's Deuce McAllister was first on the list, followed, in order, by Wisconsin's Michael Bennett, Texas Christian's LaDainian Tomlinson and Pittsburgh's Kevan Barlow.

Buckhalter carried 10 times for 54 yards and caught three passes for 61 yards for the victorious West team in the all-star game/NFL audition, an "outstanding effort," according to Kiper.

Buckhalter's ability to catch the ball, during workouts leading up to the game as well as in the game itself, was what most impressed observers. He helped himself "immensely" during his time in San Francisco, according to Gil Brandt, who put together rosters for the game.

Brandt was the Dallas Cowboys' vice president of player personnel for 30 years.

"I pretty much caught all the balls that were being thrown to me," Buckhalter said recently, in typical low-key fashion. "I think that was the biggest thing for me, showing them I could catch."

Buckhalter ran good routes and displayed good hands, something he was rarely asked to show at Nebraska. He caught 24 passes for 205 yards and one touchdown in four seasons.

He had five receptions for 85 yards, 34 of them on a touchdown play against Missouri, this past season. He also caught an Eric Crouch pass for a crucial 25-yard gain on the first play of the fourth quarter of the Iowa State game — with the Cornhuskers clinging to a 21-20 lead.

"Everybody was surprised when I ran out of the backfield and caught that long pass," he said.

Nebraska rarely throws anyway, so it's bound to be a surprise when a running back is the receiver.

Buckhalter regularly ran routes in practice, however, "some pretty good routes," he said. And that practice will serve him well in pursuit of a childhood dream, playing in the NFL.

"You never know how that's going to work out for you," he said. "I'm just fortunate to follow through with my dream to play because I'm going to have the opportunity."

He'll have that opportunity even though he was never

really the Cornhuskers' featured back, evidence that NFL scouts will find those with ability. He had only nine starts, all but two of them as a sophomore in 1998, when he led the team in rushing with 799 yards and eight touchdowns.

But he never complained, and except for a day or two early in his junior season when he felt unappreciated and expendable, he was always ready to do whatever he was asked.

Buckhalter checked in his ego when he checked out equipment in the fall of 1997.

"I didn't ever think I was going to come in and take all the snaps and when I get tired I'll come out and let another player come in and give me a break," he said. "I was never cocky enough to always think like 'I'm going to get all the snaps' and stuff like that. I never really thought like that."

"I guess it was the way I was raised, just to be a strong and hard worker, not to be someone that always complained and always was like, 'I'm the man,' have that type of attitude."

That isn't to say he lacked confidence in his abilities.

"Everybody has thoughts of, 'I wish I could have gone somewhere and been a starter.' But I'm glad that I didn't go somewhere and have 350 carries a season and my body is wrecked," he said.

"I've still got a fresh body. So that'll help me in the long run."

Buckhalter carried only 413 times during his career, not counting bowl games. He gained 2,522 yards, to rank eighth on the Cornhuskers' all-time list, and he scored 27 touchdowns.

His numbers reflect his reliability, as well as his ability to get the job done.

He has shown he can "find the end zone," according to Kiper.

The next step in the process is the NFL scouting Combine in Indianapolis. Then NFL scouts and coaches will visit Nebraska the first week in March to evaluate prospects.

In the mean time, Buckhalter will work out with other former Cornhuskers. "It's kind of good being in that kind of atmosphere because we're all pushing each other to get it done," he said.

Such positive pressure has characterized his experience at Nebraska. There has always been someone pushing him. That's how a backup can realistically aspire to play in the NFL.

Playing for the Cornhuskers, "that's a big advantage," he said.

"I think it's a positive. Nebraska has so much history behind it; people out there, no matter if you're a starter or the No. 2 guy, they know that you can play football."

So it probably shouldn't be a surprise when Buckhalter gets drafted. ■

Mike Babcock is a former sports columnist for the Lincoln Journal Star. He has covered Nebraska football for more than 20 years. Mike can be reached at mdb@inetnebr.com or P.O. Box 6782, Lincoln, NE 68506.



Correll Buckhalter
rushed for 2,522 yards
and 27 touchdowns.

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Freshman Frustration

**After promising start,
foot injury hampers Huskers' Cowgill**



**Terry
DOUGLASS**

IT'S DIFFICULT for Paul Sanderford to judge the impact that a healthy KC Cowgill might make on the Nebraska women's basketball team. All the Cornhuskers' coach knows is that he'd like to find out.

Following a Feb. 7 loss to Oklahoma, Nebraska's record slipped to 10-13 overall and 2-8 in the Big 12 Conference. Sanderford said that the Huskers' recent struggles and the fact that Cowgill has been sidelined for most of the past two months with a stress reaction in her left foot aren't merely a coincidence.

At times, Sanderford has compared his team to an orchestra without a conductor. He's suggested more than once that a healthy Cowgill might just be able to change Nebraska's tune.

"I think one of the problems that this team has experienced has been the result of KC Cowgill's injury," Sanderford said. "She brings unbelievable maturity as a freshman. She grew up as a gym rat, and she understands the game."

"She has weaknesses in her game like every young kid, but she sees the big picture a lot better than most college freshmen."

Cowgill came to the Cornhusker program labeled as a scorer — and for good reason. At Grand Island Central Catholic High School, the 5-foot-8 guard set the Nebraska prep record with 318 career 3-pointers and finished as the state's No. 2 all-time scorer with 2,427 points. However, Sanderford said Cowgill is much more than just a sharpshooter.

"KC has the innate ability to make other people better," Sanderford said. "A lot of people look at her as just a shooter. She can score — and God knows we've needed that, too — but some kids have that ability to step on the floor and make the four other kids better."

"I've been doing this 23 years, and I've had maybe four or five players in 23 years that have the ability to make others better like she does."

Nebraska sophomore forward Stephanie Jones can't wait for Cowgill to get healthy again. When asked about Cowgill's worth to the team, Jones enthusiastically interrupted the question. "Love that kid," said Jones, an Omaha Benson graduate who played with Cowgill on various all-star teams during their high school careers.

"When KC was playing earlier this season, all my stats started going up," Jones said. "She was starting to find her spot on the team, and I was right along with her."

Jones said that despite being a freshman, Cowgill gives the team the leadership element it often lacks.

"KC talks. She's like a little general out there," Jones said. "She'll be telling people to go here and go there. She brings more than just scoring to the floor. She's one component we're missing that would really help us out there."

No one is more frustrated with the situation than Cowgill, a fierce competitor who admits that she has trouble sleeping

at night following losses. On Dec. 10 against St. Peter's, Cowgill made her second start and scored a career-high 23 points in a Husker victory. But soon after that, Cowgill's foot injury flared up, and Nebraska lost 10 of its next 15 games.

"It's been very frustrating," Cowgill said. "At the start, I thought it was going to be three weeks, and then I could play no matter what. Then it turned into four weeks, and then six weeks, and then the doctors said it would be 12 weeks before it started feeling better. It just keeps getting longer, and it's just so frustrating."

For Cowgill, the first significant injury of her basketball career couldn't have come at a more inopportune time.

"I was starting to feel more comfortable, finding the groove as to when to shoot and when to pass," said Cowgill, who has averaged 8.1 points in the 10 games that she's played. "I thought I was playing pretty good, and then my foot just started hurting. Then, it got bad real fast."

For those without a medical degree, a stress reaction is similar to a stress fracture, except that the bone hasn't broken yet. Needless to say, it's painful.

"I'm just kind of taking it one day at a time now," said Cowgill, who saw limited action in games against Kansas and Iowa State before having to rest her foot against Oklahoma. "Some days it hurts, some days it feels great."

When it comes to injuries, Jones can certainly empathize with Cowgill's plight. Last year, Jones suffered a season-ending knee injury just seven games into her Husker career.

"KC loves the game, so to see her not be able to do anything hurts me because I was right there in about that same spot last year," Jones said. "I know her. I know that she's lying when she says that it doesn't hurt."

Jones said she's been impressed with Cowgill's attitude since her injury.

"She's still right there on the sidelines, still riding the bike and still yelling for us," Jones said. "She wants to be out there on the court, and we want her to be there, too. It hurts us almost as much as it hurts her, just seeing the ability she has and knowing that she can't give it to us. It's kind of like having a roadblock right in front of you that's keeping you from getting started."

The physical pain Cowgill has endured hasn't been helped by the fact that Nebraska has struggled to win games. One aspect of basketball Cowgill doesn't have much experience with is losing, and she said that it's something she refuses to get used to.

"I'm trying not to adjust," Cowgill said. "It's just been frustrating, and the worst part about it is that I think we have the talent to be one of the top Big 12 teams. Instead, it seems like we've been going out and losing every night. It's been hard to get through."

Just like a roadblock. ■



KC Cowgill holds the state high school record for 3-pointers

Terry Douglass is the sports editor of the Grand Island Independent. He can be reached at douglass@ginetworks.com.

Talkin' Baseball

Top 10 preseason rankings show how far Husker program has come



**Curt
McKEEVER**

YOU WANT TO MEASURE how far the Nebraska baseball program has come? Well, check out the Cornhuskers' murderer's row schedule in February.

During a three-game tournament in Houston, NU faced seventh-ranked Rice and top-ranked Georgia Tech.

Two weekends later, Van Horn's troops went to Lafayette, La., and took on 1999 Super Regional participant Ohio State, 2000 College World Series qualifier Louisiana-Lafayette and the model program for non-Sun Belt schools, Wichita State.

All this before the opening Big 12 Conference series at Texas Tech the first weekend of March.

Has Van Horn lost his marbles?

"There's no doubt there's other tournaments I could go to where winning games would be a lot easier," he said. "I'm trying to get us ready for the Big 12. If we go out and start .500 and go to Lubbock and get after 'em, I'm going to be happy about what we did."

Even if they don't, no one's going to argue with him anyway.

Nebraska began the season ranked in the top 10 of all three polls (topping out at No. 4 in Collegiate Baseball) and is the overwhelming favorite to win the Big 12.

No wonder Van Horn's status with NU fans is the same — overwhelmingly popular.

During halftime of the Nebraska-Missouri men's basketball game, Van Horn cozied up to a crowd that a few years back would have needed directions to get to Buck Beltzer Stadium.

What he promised was a team that "will play hard every inning." And if the folks see that, perhaps they'll want to put up their No. 7 Eric Crouch jerseys for the spring in favor of a Shane Komine model.

Anybody who follows college baseball knows that Komine wears No. 28.

And trust me, everybody who follows college baseball is talking about Nebraska and their rise to the top.

"Do I have a hard time doing that?" asked Oklahoma State Coach Tom Holliday, regarding rating the Huskers in the top five. "No. They've earned it."

"I think it's great that we have them. I'm tickled to death that people up North are taking baseball serious."

Serious is fine, but this borders on the ridiculous. Holliday might be right about Nebraska, but you'd better believe lots of people are pinching themselves when they hear the Huskers being talked about as conference favorites and national championship contenders in BASEBALL.

Imagine if they had won that final game against Stanford

last season and made it to the College World Series.

"I wish they were able to pull that off," Texas A&M Coach Mark Johnson contended.

So does Van Horn, who knows Nebraska will be EXPECTED to take that next step this year.

But as impressive as the Huskers look on paper, we should remember that the best team in the country last season (South Carolina) couldn't get to Omaha.

Remember, too, that Van Horn must completely retool up the middle, with All-America catcher Justin Cowan, steady shortstop Brandt Vlieger and the nation's top defensive center fielder, Jamal Strong, all having moved on.

"Our team's been getting a lot of press," Van Horn said. "I don't know if we're ready for that (kind of pressure), honestly."

What he is comfortable with is his team's talent level.

Nebraska had the lowest earned-run average in the nation last season and Texas Tech Coach Larry Hays wouldn't be surprised if the Huskers do it again.

"If there's a better staff in the country, I don't know where it is," he said.

The All-American Komine leads the staff, which also features freshman All-American Jamie Rodrigue (9-4 last season) and junior R.D. Spihehs (8-2). Last year's closer, Thom Ott, could eventually move into the starting rotation, but he started out in the bullpen.

At catcher, Van Horn was deciding between two junior college transfers — Tito Rivera and Jed Morris — to fill the big hole left by Cowan.

Battling at shortstop were two JUCO transfers — Brandon Eymann (a first-team All-American) and Willie Jones.

In the outfield, Adam Stern has moved to center to replace Strong. John Cole in left and Jeff Leise will flank Stern, and Van Horn believes newcomers Justin Seely and Drew Anderson will be factors.

"We're gonna have some good days and some days where we hear fans say we're overrated," Van Horn acknowledged. "We know that we have a lot to prove."

That should be no problem. Think otherwise? Well, just take a look at the schedule.

"Naturally, when you lose your starting catcher, center fielder, shortstop and right fielder, you're concerned," Van Horn said. "But we have a lot of talent... We feel like we'll be right back in the middle of it." ■



Coach Dave Van Horn is comfortable with his team's talent level.

Curt McKeever is a sportswriter, covering the University of Nebraska for the Lincoln Journal Star. In addition to reporting on football he is the primary beat writer for the men's basketball and baseball teams.



Passi

**Crouch says
pain-free shoulder
will help Huskers'
aerial attack**

By Mike Babcock

Even Frank Solich might not have known the extent of the problem.

"Probably not," Nebraska quarterback Eric Crouch said. "I'm a little stubborn when it comes to the pain factor. I just want to be out there. I want to be playing through the pain."

Crouch played through pain in his right shoulder last season, all of last season.

The shoulder bothered him during two-a-day preseason practices and continued to bother him through the Alamo Bowl game. Five days after that decisive victory against Northwestern, Crouch underwent surgery on the shoulder at the Alabama Sports Medicine Center in Birmingham.

Now the senior-to-be from Omaha is following a rehabilitation program that will require him to miss spring practice but should have him throwing without pain by the first of May. Prior to May 1, he won't be throwing at all.

"This year, I'm staying on track," he said. "I think that's a big difference. The pain is definitely less, and the problems I had last year, or this year, were fixed."

Crouch underwent surgery on the shoulder after his sophomore season as well. But the surgery wasn't as extensive, and he rushed the rehabilitation process, mostly out of impatience.

As a result, the shoulder was never pain-free.

The pain wasn't unbearable, although "two-a-days were pretty rough for me, throwing the ball twice a day when I wasn't used to that," said Crouch. "I think it stayed pretty constant."

"It didn't get any worse, which is really good. I didn't have to see the doctor as much last year as I did the

As a junior, Eric Crouch completed 75 of 156 passes (48.1 percent) for 1,101 yards and 11 touchdowns. His career completion percentage is 49.6.

ng Marks?

Nebraska's Passing Statistics

Season	C-A-I	Pct.	Yards	TD	NCAA Rating
2000	84-172-8	48.8	1,217	11	120.07
1999	94-184-5	51.1	1,515	9	126.2
1998	118-208-5	56.7	1,574	7	126.59
1997	99-182-4	54.4	1,453	5	126.13
1996	113-222-3	50.9	1,566	14	128.26
1995	123-228-6	53.9	1,721	18	138.14
1994	120-210-7	57.1	1,654	15	140.2
1993	103-201-6	51.2	1,508	16	134.6
1992	91-199-7	45.7	1,210	15	114.6
1991	116-205-8	56.6	1,686	15	142.0

year before for my shoulder. So that was a big difference."

He confided in Solich, who allowed him to skip an occasional practice to rest his shoulder and reduced the amount of throwing he did. "So that was pretty good for me," he said.

He never considered taking himself out of a game because of the pain, however. Except for mop-up situations, in which Jammal Lord got to play, Crouch was on the field all the time.

"I don't think the pain was that bad at all," he said. "It was just hurting me a little bit as far as when I threw the ball. It didn't hurt when I got hit. It didn't hurt when I fell on it. It was just when I threw. I knew something was wrong throwing the ball. But I knew I could run. I could take hits."

"It was something I could probably play through. And I did."

That's not to say the soreness didn't have an effect on his passing. It did. Crouch had difficulty throwing long passes, in particular, "deep patterns, things where you have to really crank one out and get (the arm) back further," he said. "I think it

changed my motion a little bit.

"I couldn't get my arm up as far, and back. I couldn't use my body like I was used to. And that's where all of your strength comes from, in your mid-section."

When he threw long, the ball tended to sail.

Although Crouch isn't one to use soreness in his shoulder as an excuse, he didn't pass as effectively last season as he did in 1999, when he completed 83-of-160 passes (51.9 percent) for 1,269 yards and seven touchdowns. He threw for more touchdowns last season, 11, but his percentage dropped to 48.1 and his NCAA passing efficiency rating declined slightly, from 127.93 to 121.66.

The team pass efficiency rating of 120.07 was the lowest since 1992. That also was the last season in which the Cornhuskers passed for fewer yards and had a lower completion percentage. Those are the only seasons in the last 10 in which Nebraska has completed less than 50 percent of its passes.

And without Crouch's 10-of-13 passing performance for 159 yards and five touchdowns against Iowa,



Scott Bruhn

Split end Wilson Thomas (congratulating Eric Crouch) has the height and athletic ability to be a key contributor in the passing game, according to Crouch.

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the decline in efficiency would have been considerably more dramatic.

He finished his junior season with 75-of-156 completions for 1,101 yards and 11 touchdowns.

Regardless of the statistics, "we have a great throwing game," he said. "We've just got to go out and throw the right patterns. We don't have a lot of receivers that are going to go down the field and catch all the deep balls, like Florida State has. They (the Seminoles) recruit specifically for that."

"So it's hard for us to get those receivers to come to school here."

That's not to say the Cornhuskers lack quality receivers, Crouch was quick to add. "Last year, we could throw deep to Matt (Davison) and Bobby (Newcombe); hopefully, Wilson (Thomas) is a guy that can come around and do something like that for us, with his height and his athletic ability."

John Gibson, who is petitioning the NCAA for a sixth season of eligibility, is "another guy that can catch deep balls," said Crouch. "So we've got athletes to do that."

But Nebraska's passing game is less suited to going down the field. The Cornhuskers are more effective when they use "crossing routes, out routes, in routes . . . curls, timing patterns."

That was never more apparent than in the closing seconds of the Colorado game, when Crouch took the team down the field to set up Josh Brown's winning field goal by completing 4-of-5 passes.

The four completions were all "out patterns" to Newcombe and Gibson.

Nebraska may have gotten away from such an approach much of last season, according to Crouch. "We tried to throw deep a lot," he said. "We didn't get back to our normal passing attack."

He and Solich have discussed that since season's end, and "we decided next year, we're going to work on our timing a lot better and throw those routes that we're used to," Crouch said.

"I think that's what we did toward the end of (last) year in practice. We cut back, I would say, with some of the pass patterns, focused

on a few to where we could be more efficient."

A pain-free shoulder will help the passing, too.

"I almost feel like I have a normal shoulder again," he said. "Velocity was a big thing for me last year. I think I can definitely get that back and have a normal throwing motion, to where I was in high school, because no one really knows what my throwing motion is like."

"I hurt my shoulder on the first play of my (Cornhusker) career."

Crouch is wiser for having gone through the two surgeries on his shoulder. A year ago, when he rushed his rehabilitation, "I had pain

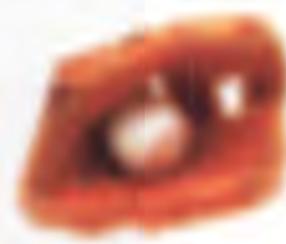
the whole time," he said. "I thought maybe that was normal, (that) you're supposed to have pain a little bit and then some day it would just go away."

"That never really happened, but I got to the point where I could play."

Eventually, however, "there is a point where you've got to tell yourself, 'Something's bothering me, something's wrong,' and you let the coaches know so you don't make it any worse."

At that point he told Solich. But he might have held back just a little.

Playing with pain, "that's part of the game," said Crouch. ■



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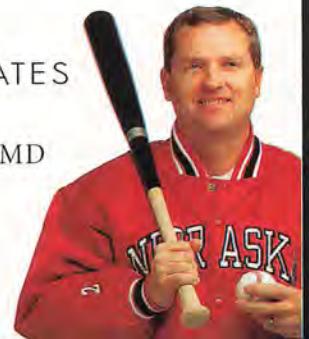
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Tough Enough

***Toughness is
a priority in
Solich's fourth
recruiting class***

By Mike Babcock

Marques Simmons, a high school senior in Davenport, Iowa, has run the 100 meters in 10.34 seconds and the 200 meters in 21.44 seconds. No one can question his speed.

"If you look for speed, you want to start with Marques," Nebraska football coach Frank Solich said during a news conference to announce the Cornhuskers' 2001 recruiting class.

But the 5-foot-10, 190-pound Simmons has more than sprinter's speed. "He's got great toughness," said Solich. "If you turn the film on and you watch it, you'll see a guy that's not just a track guy lined up at I-back; you'll see a running back with great speed and toughness."

Without the toughness, Nebraska wouldn't have been interested in Simmons, or in any of 16 other high school athletes and one junior college transfer who signed letters of intent on Feb. 7.

Actually, the Cornhuskers signed 19 players in all. Manaia Brown, a 6-foot-4, 280-pound rush end from Salt Lake City, originally signed a year ago but had to be re-signed.

He enrolled in classes in January and will participate in spring prac-



Nebraska went heavy on defensive players, including safety Philip Bland (above) of Lafayette (Fairview), Colo., and linebacker Barrett Ruud (right) of Lincoln Southeast. Both also played offense in high school. Bland was a receiver and Ruud an I-back.

tice. He is on scholarship and "will be a part of this class as far as his first introduction to football in the fall," Solich said.

By all indications, Brown has the aforementioned toughness, a priority in Solich's fourth recruiting class. As always, speed and size were important. "You'd better be bringing into your program people with size also," said Solich. "You'd better have a pretty good combination."

In addition, "one thing we decided to do . . . was make sure we were able to determine a player's toughness before we went forward with them and brought them into this class, regardless of speed, regardless of size," he said. "We feel very good about all three of those aspects."

Players can be measured and weighed, and they can be timed in the 40-yard dash. Toughness, how-



Scott Bruhn

ever, can't be quantified, which makes it more difficult to determine.

Difficult, perhaps, but not impossible. A coach can see how tough players are "by watching how they go into contact, watching how they come out the other end of contact, watching what they do without the football. If they're on defense, watching how they tackle," Solich said.

"Are they diving at people's

ankles? Are they striking up through you? There are a lot of things to look at, a lot of ways to evaluate players on that end of it.

"I would not say that it's something we saw as a deficiency in the program. But I think sometimes when you start to watch guys at skilled positions, you see a great catch and you see a great burst and at times, maybe you think that's enough. Well, it's really not enough.

"The same thing from a defensive back standpoint, at really any position: A guy may have great movement, may have all the agility and athletic skills that there are, but if they're not able to do it play after play and if they're not able to strike you the way it's going to take to really play offense and defense in the Big 12, then having all the talent in the world isn't going to get it done.

"They'd better be ready to play four quarters that way. That's what we're after."

What the Cornhuskers got this year was a recruiting class that includes 11 players slated for defense, not counting Brown. And six of those 11 are listed as cornerbacks and safeties: Philip Bland, Daniel Bullocks, Josh Bullocks, Antwon Guidry, Randy Landingham and Danieal Manning.

Although Nebraska is "always going to take a great player, almost regardless of position," Solich said, defense was a priority this year. "We went heavy on defensive players; there is no question about it. We certainly want to make sure that we will be a great defensive football team.

"If you just look at the Super Bowl, you just look at the Big 12 championship game, if you look at the national championship game, you saw great defense played."

And the Cornhuskers used those games as models, following a season in which they were inconsistent on defense. They ranked 26th nationally in both total defense and scoring defense.

And they allowed an average of 19.4 points per game, the most by Nebraska since 1958.

The class also includes four defensive tackles, which Solich acknowledged as potentially the best he's seen at Nebraska. "I've only been here 22 years," he said. "But I can't remember a better group of defensive linemen in terms of combination of size and speed and guys that have made plays."

Titus Adams, Seppo Evvaraye, Jared Helming and Le Kevin Smith all earned prep All-America recognition. Adams and Helming both

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were Parade magazine All-Americans.

The Cornhuskers' other defensive recruit is Barrett Ruud, a linebacker. Nebraska recruited four linebackers a year ago, one of whom, T.J. Hollowell, played as a true freshman.

The Cornhuskers recruited four offensive linemen last year and five the year before that, so they are bringing in only two this time around, Richie Incognito and Gary Pike.

The remaining five offensive recruits are listed at the "skill" positions. They include wide receiver

Clifford Brye, the transfer from Hutchinson, Kan., Community College; quarterbacks Mike McLaughlin and Mike Stuntz, and running backs Simmons and Cory Ross.

Nebraska didn't have as many early commitments as in recent seasons, and Smith and Simmons didn't make their intentions public until letter-of-intent signing day.

McLaughlin was the first to make an oral commitment to the Cornhuskers, in early April. He was followed by Incognito, who said a month later he would accept a scholarship.

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Parade All-American Titus Adams (right) of Omaha Creighton was named the state's defensive player of the year by the Omaha World-Herald and the Lincoln Journal-Star.

Nearly everyone who committed early held firm. Dan Stevenson, an offensive lineman from Barrington, Ill., and Hakim Hill, a running back from Iowa City, Iowa, were exceptions.

That fewer recruits announced their intentions early didn't concern Solich. "I think it was a combination of the way some of the players we were recruiting went about the recruiting process," he said. "Some of them had determined they were just going to play this thing out and visit three, four, five schools. And I think we were really very selective before we 'OK-ed' and accepted a player."

"There are many very good players at the end, so you want to make sure as you're going through it that you're taking the players you want, at the positions that you need . . . that you're not taking a guy that you have any uncertainty about. So in this particular year, it just played out that we were comfortable with the players we took early on, but we were in the mix for a lot of guys that decided later."

"And we were fortunate to get the numbers that we wanted."

Waiting for highly touted players such as Simmons and Smith, particularly in the case of Smith who's from Macon, Ga., can sometimes lead to disappointment. "To think that you're just going to out-do everybody on every one is certainly not probably good thinking," Solich said.

Nebraska's class was regarded by national recruiting analysts as outstanding even before those two signed letters of intent, however. And adding them simply capped an already successful effort.

"We really feel it's an excellent class," said Solich. "Really, in looking at it, (it's) exceptional in terms of the speed, the size, the athleticism, the toughness . . . all the things we really look very hard at."

"We feel really very good about this group." ■



Scott Brahn

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2001 Recruiting Class

Subtle Changes

*It wasn't as easy
for the Huskers
to get early
commitments*

By James Hale

The college football landscape changed just a bit in 2000. Oh, Nebraska is still one of the elite teams in college football, but even a tradition-rich program like the Cornhuskers is having to deal with some subtle changes in the game.

And all of them are not on the field either. The recruiting landscape also has a different look to it than it did in the 1990s, and new teams have emerged as solid contenders for top prospects across the board.

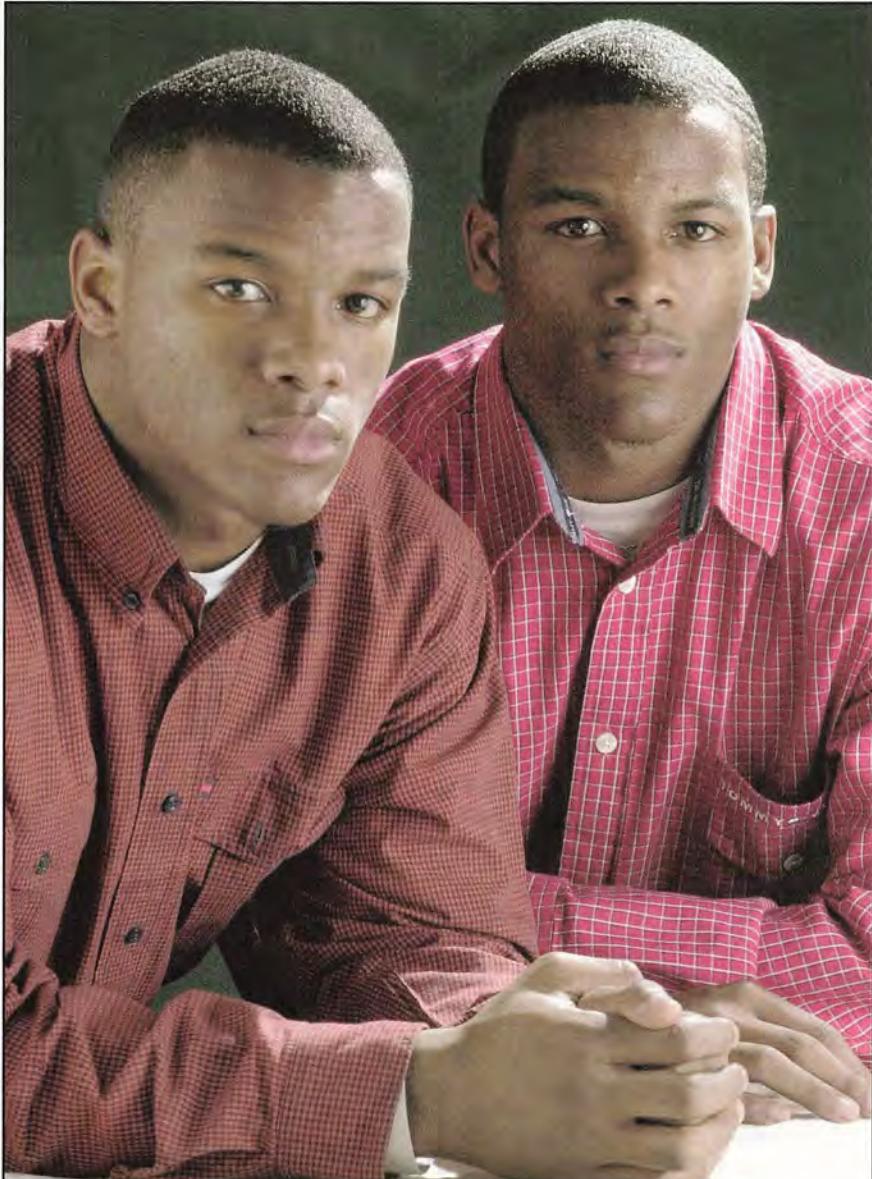
Oklahoma has resurfaced as a power, Kansas State remains a power, Purdue is a solid top-25 program, Texas is bidding for the prime time, and Miami, Florida State and Florida don't look as if they are going anywhere. All of these schools and more have become very competitive on the field and certainly in the recruiting game.

Nebraska lost two games this year and in some ways had a disappointing season. The Huskers didn't win the Big 12 title or even the Big 12 North, and for many Husker fans, the season was a waste. However, in reality, Nebraska had a very nice year and put on a dominating performance in the Alamo Bowl.

The same goes in recruiting. The Huskers didn't sign the top class in the country, but they did put together a class that belongs in the top 20. Many other teams would certainly trade for it. Nor did Nebraska finish with the top class in the Big 12. That honor belongs to Oklahoma or Texas. However, the Huskers' class is a solid third in the conference, with enough star power to rival their Big 12 opponents.

The art of recruiting also changed

Tina Baker/Chattanooga Times Free Press



Josh (left) and Daniel Bullocks of Hixson High School in Chattanooga, Tenn., became the first twins to sign with Nebraska.

for Nebraska this year. The trend since the mid-90s has been for the major powers to get the majority of their class committed by Christmas, leaving teams with monitoring duty on those commitments and with the ability to start scouting juniors. Nebraska, Penn State, Ohio State, Florida State and Texas have been the leaders in this category for some time.

Early trends are still in vogue in college football, and Nebraska is still one of the leaders in this category. However, this year it wasn't as easy for the Huskers to secure early commitments, and once they did, they had to fight like the dickens to hold a few of them.

Running back Cory Ross of Denver (Thomas Jefferson) held off suitors

until signing day. Cornerback Randy Landingham of Sonora, Calif., did the same, and cornerback Antwon Guidry of Campbell, Calif., had his phone ring off the hook, as rival recruiters continued to call despite his commitment to Nebraska.

Offensive lineman Dan Stevenson of Barrington, Ill., committed late in the summer to Nebraska, and before the end of October, he had been recruited so hard by other schools that he switched to Wisconsin, stating that he no longer fit in at Nebraska. How could an athlete be so sure that he fit in at a school when he committed early and then feel he didn't fit in a later date? It seems everybody can change their mind, especially when they have 10 recruiters from 10 different schools still knocking at their door.

By the end of the summer, Nebraska still had a handful of early commitments. Quarterback was a top priority, and the Cornhuskers had an oral commitment from Mike McLaughlin immediately after signing day 2000. McLaughlin is from Omaha (Millard North), Neb., where the Huskers have signed a number of players, including current quarterback Eric Crouch.

"There wasn't any question for me where I was going to go to school," McLaughlin said. "I am an option quarterback growing up in Nebraska here at Millard North high school, so where else do I want to go?"

"Eric is a legend around here and still comes around to work out with us every once in a while. Eric goes over some pointers with us on running the option, and he still has a great allegiance with us here at North."

"We have a pretty good tradition of quarterbacks that go to Nebraska, so I didn't need to go through the recruiting process. Once Nebraska indicated they wanted me, that was all I needed to hear."

Following McLaughlin's lead, it didn't take long for other commitments to roll in. Offensive lineman Richie Incognito of Glendale (Mountain Ridge), Ariz., committed in May. Quarterback Mike Stuntz of Council Bluffs (Saint Albert), Iowa, decided that Nebraska was also the school for his option skills. He was joined in June by defensive tackle Jared Helming of Springfield (Kickapoo), Mo., offensive lineman Seppo Evwaraye of Laurel, Neb., and linebacker Barrett Ruud of Lincoln (Southeast).

Ross also committed to Nebraska in June, but his story would be a long way from over. Another Colorado player, offensive lineman Gary Pike of Pueblo (Centennial) rounded out the summer commitments in July.



Mike McLaughlin, an option quarterback from Millard North — Eric Crouch's alma mater — was the first player in the class to commit to the Huskers.

Eight commitments from eight outstanding athletes are not a bad way to start the recruiting year. However, things turned weird when Nebraska didn't earn another commitment until Ross recommitted in October, and wide receiver Cliff Brye of Hutchinson (Kan.) Community College came on board at the end of November.

"Things weren't normal for us in that regard this year, as we had to go further in the recruiting season this time around," Nebraska Coach Frank Solich said. "I think it is a combination of a way that some of the players that we were recruiting went about the recruiting process. I think we were very selective before we accepted a player coming to Nebraska on scholarship. So, in going through that process, you see that there are many very good players at the end."

"So, you want to make sure as you go through it that you are taking the players that you want and the players that you need, and you are not taking a guy that you have any uncertainty about. In this particular year, it just played out that we were comfortable with the guys that we took early on, but we were in the mix for a number of guys that decided later, and we were fortunate to get the numbers that we wanted. That is not always the case."

"I think it is difficult sometimes coming down to the end to just draw a lot of quality players, because we are asking a number of players to come a great distance. There are also good quality schools recruiting those players close to home, and thus the process drags out. That was certainly how it played out for us this year."

Once again, Nebraska was able to get a great start on recruiting because

of the success of its summer camps. Nine of the 18 recruits signed in the class attended the Husker summer camp.

"For the last three years, we have been averaging around 10 players who we sign that come out of camps," Solich said. "I guess our feeling is that we see them on tape, you see them first hand because you coach them, and without question, you have a better feel for a young man. So, camps have become very important, not only in our process of evaluating players, but also in the process of schools around the country evaluating players."

"Everybody is out there trying to get players into their camp. The thing about ours is that it fills up, and we have players come from all around the country to work out in our camps. So, we get a chance to look at quality players from all over, and that makes it very easy for us to really determine what we have and what kind of player is there in camp."

"When they leave here, you pretty much have an idea if they can play football in the Big 12 or not. Sometimes, just by evaluating on film, you can't become clear in your mind that player can help you, but if a player is in our camp and we also have film on him, we have a better understanding on what that player can do for us."

Recruiting is a dog-eat-dog business, and every year Nebraska is one of the big dogs. This year wasn't any different, however, it was clear that more college programs have jumped up to challenge the Nebraska-type programs. More teams are recruiting the elite athletes, and more teams are in a legitimate position to talk with those athletes.

Nebraska had a legitimate shot at 23 of the top 100 players in the country. This ranked up there with most top recruiting schools. Fourteen of the players signed by the Huskers were ranked as All-Americans by at least one recruiting service or media poll.

Ross was one of those players, and Nebraska was in a late major recruiting battle for two of the top-100 recruits in defensive tackle Le Kevin Smith of Macon (Stratford Academy), Ga., and running back Marques Simmons of Davenport (North), Iowa, right up until signing day. All three players were in different recruiting situations, but all three give a clear indication of what recruiting was like for the Huskers this year.

Ross committed in the summer, and at the time was elated with his decision. He said he was going to play for the best football team in the country, and he was thrilled that Nebraska was going to let him play running back. Most teams were recruiting Ross as a cornerback, but he said Nebraska thought he could be a breakaway threat at running back, and that is where he really wanted to play.

Then, in September, something or somebody got to him. Word hit the recruiting trail that Ross was reconsidering his commitment and was now thinking of visiting Colorado. Ross's father said he needed to look around a little bit to make sure he was making the right decision.

Ross is no different than a number of recruits today who play a cat and mouse recruiting game. They know programs are looking for early commitments, and they are told only so many scholarships are available. The thinking is if you want one of those scholarships then you need to commit to one early, but in reality, you are telling programs that you are keeping your options open.

"In my mind, I was going to Nebraska all along, but all these other schools kept calling," Ross said. "I would tell them I was committed to Nebraska, but they would call anyway. All of them are good talkers and have a good program to sell, and it is tough not to listen."

"Then, I got a little confused. Coach Solich was great throughout the whole time. He realizes I am young and need to experience things. He never gave up on me, and I appreciate that. Even when I was thinking things through, I still knew that Nebraska was the best football team in the country, and I still understood where I needed to go."

Solich has been around college football for a long time, and he understands what a player like Ross had to go through to stick with his commit-



Seppo Evvaraye (right), a foreign exchange student who played for Laurel-Concord (Neb.) High School, is the largest player in the class at 6-foot-5 and 325 pounds.

ment.

"I want to thank Cory and his family for hanging in there with us, despite the fact other programs were calling them right up until signing day," Solich said. "Recruiting is a very intense time for every young man we recruit, and each recruit is told so many things that many times they have trouble separating what is the truth and what is not the truth. Cory understood how much he meant to our program and hung in there with us until the very end, and we are proud of him for that."

Solich said he wanted to acknowledge the recruits and their parents and guardians for the manner in which they went through the recruiting process.

"As you know, in this day and age in recruiting, there are programs that will throw a lot of glitz and glamour out there at recruits, but I think these recruits and their families looked through that and really studied what the schools were all about that were considering them," he said. They considered the academic support, the tradition and the type of football that is played at the schools. We feel good about the fact that they did their home-

work and identified Nebraska as a place to experience their educational and college football career."

Nebraska didn't have a full load of scholarships to offer and was very selective in who it offered. In December, the Huskers picked up commitments from cornerback Guidry, rover Philip Bland of Lafayette (Fairview), Colo., defensive tackle Titus Adams of Omaha (Creighton Prep) and cornerback Landingham.

All four athletes were impact recruits that had offers on the table from 10 programs or more.

In January, things continued to go well as cornerback Danieal Manning of Corsicana, Texas, gave the Huskers another outstanding defensive back prospect. Then in mid-January, the Bullocks twins, Daniel and Josh, finally picked the Huskers over Auburn, Tennessee, Mississippi State and Alabama.

For the Bullocks, the pressure to stay down south was tremendous, but the lure to play for Nebraska was too much to pass up.

"All of our friends and classmates were telling us that we should go to Tennessee or Alabama," Daniel Bullocks said. "However, once we sat

down and told them how great Nebraska is, they realized we were making a great decision for us. Sure, they wanted us to stay close to home, but they wanted us to be happy more."

If Nebraska had stopped right there, the class would have been very good. However, the Huskers never stop when outstanding prospects are still available and can still be signed.

Georgian Smith grew up a Florida State fan, and his parents in the beginning wanted him to be a Seminole, and FSU was all over him trying to get him to Tallahassee.

However, there was something about his visit to Nebraska that he couldn't shake. Even when he took his late visit to Florida State, he couldn't get Nebraska off his mind.

"Nebraska football is so important to the people in Nebraska, and it means so much to them," Smith said. "On my recruiting trip, everywhere we went, there was somebody that told me that they loved Nebraska football and that they hoped I would someday be playing for them. I didn't get that on any other visit, including Florida State. It means so much to really be wanted, and I just felt that it was more important for me to go to Nebraska than it was for me to go Florida State or anywhere else."

When Simmons took his final visit

"On my recruiting trip, everywhere we went, there was somebody that told me that they loved Nebraska football and that they hoped I would someday be playing for them. I didn't get that on any other visit, including Florida State."

— Nebraska recruit Le Kevin Smith

to Nebraska, the Huskers were a distant third to home-state schools Iowa and Iowa State. Throughout the recruiting process, Simmons let everybody know that he was leaning toward staying instate and that Wisconsin and Nebraska would be longshots to get him. However, Nebraska had the final visit with him, and the Huskers needed another running back in the class.

"I didn't really understand what Nebraska football was all about when I actually had a chance to see and study the program for myself," Simmons said. "Sure, I knew they were a good program, but I didn't understand how good the program really was. They are dominant in so many ways, and they were so much better than either Iowa or Iowa State."

Yes, it was a different year for the Huskers in that they had not already put together a top-10 class by Christmas. But that didn't stop the

coaching staff from doing what it does best and that is sell the program. The big knocks came during the final weekend of recruiting. At the buzzer on signing day, the Huskers landed two All-America talents that greatly raised the level of the recruiting class.

"Getting both Smith and Simmons on signing day is a bit of good fortune for us," Solich said. "Both are at critical positions for us, and both are very talented players. I think we came from behind on both as well, which says something about our coaching staff.

"We have a great program and a great university to sell, and our assistant coaches do a great job of spreading the word. Getting two great players on signing day, when you really don't know where they are going to go, brings a little excitement to the class as well. Getting both Smith and Simmons really tops off what we felt was already a very talented class." ■

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Like Father

The recruiting process has changed since Tom Ruud became a Husker 30 years ago

By Mike Babcock

Tom Ruud made the most of the situation, taking football-recruiting visits to Colorado, Missouri, Florida State, Wisconsin, Iowa and Minnesota, as well as Nebraska.

The NCAA didn't limit the number of visits an athlete could take 30 years ago, so Ruud, a high school senior in Bloomington, Minn., used the opportunity "for entertainment value."

He wanted to take some trips at someone else's expense.

His son Barrett "was probably a little bit more mature about it than I was," Ruud said.

Barrett Ruud, one of 18 in the Cornhuskers' recently announced 2001 recruiting class, was considerably more mature about the process if number of visits is the measure. Although other schools recruited him, among them Notre Dame, Michigan and Tennessee, the only visit he took besides the one to Nebraska was to Notre Dame. And that was an unofficial visit, taken at his own expense.

Barrett announced in mid-June that he had made an oral commitment to Nebraska, so there was no suspense. "He didn't think he could find a place that would be any bet-

ter," Tom said.

Barrett's decision made his father proud, of course. Tom was a Cornhusker linebacker from 1972 to 1974. He was a co-captain, with Dave Humm, and a first-team all-conference selection in 1974. And he was a first-round draft choice of the NFL's Buffalo Bills, the 19th player taken, in 1975.

Tom played five seasons in the NFL, with the Bills and Cincinnati Bengals, before returning to Lincoln, where he has been in the vending business since the early 1980s.

Barrett's uncles, Bob Martin (1973-75), an All-American, and John Ruud (1978-79) also played football at Nebraska, as did his great grandfather, Clarence Swanson (1918-21).

Despite the family ties, however, Tom didn't interfere or attempt to influence his son's decision. "I've tried to be fairly objective from the get-go," he said. "I honestly was real impartial about it, probably to the other extreme. I thought it would be a good idea to talk to some other schools.

"But he (Barrett) was comfortable with the university."

So were Tom and wife Jaime. They accompanied Barrett across town on his official visit to Nebraska in December, during the



Cornhuskers' preparations for the Alamo Bowl game.

The recruiting process has changed dramatically since Tom made his visit in December of 1970. About the only similarity was the weather. The way he remembers it,

r, Like Son



Nebraska recruit Barrett Ruud was a standout linebacker for the Class A state champion Lincoln Southeast Knights. His father Tom (inset) was a Husker linebacker from 1972-74.

him, some of whom came from warm climates. Nebraska leaves nothing to chance.

"Thirty years ago, it wasn't nearly as organized," Tom said. "It was 180 degrees (different). Nothing is missed. They hit the entire spectrum, meeting everybody possible in the shortest time."

The Ruuds' day began at 7:45 a.m. and continued until 8:45 p.m., with only an hour and a half free before dinner. "I was really impressed with where they've come," said Tom.

"Not nearly the effort went into highlighting what they had (when he visited). You saw what you needed to see, from academics to personnel and everything in between."

Barrett is an excellent student like his dad, a two-time academic all-conference honoree.

Academic opportunity was a factor in Tom's decision to become a Cornhusker, that and the fact Nebraska was coming off its first national title. Tom was a fullback and linebacker on the freshman team when the Cornhuskers won a second consecutive national championship in 1971.

"I was fairly wide-open to where I wanted to go," he said.

But Nebraska made an immediate impact.

The Cornhuskers recruited Tom as a running back, but he settled on linebacker in the spring of his freshman year after trying both offense and defense on the freshman team. Barrett, the Nebraska high school "offensive player of the year" according to the Lincoln and Omaha newspapers, has wanted to play linebacker in college since his junior year in high school, his dad said.

the university was digging out after a heavy snowfall. Coming from Minnesota, that was no problem for him.

The weather was less than ideal for Barrett's visit, but that seemed to have little effect on those who joined

Again, Tom didn't try to influence Barrett's decision to play linebacker.

"It makes me happy because that's what he wants to do," Tom said.

Tom coached Barrett and younger brother Bo in youth football, but he never forced either to play the sport. Rather, he exposed them to several sports. "I tried to give them a wide variety," he said.

"I wanted them to play golf as much as anything. I was hoping they would want to continue to play high school golf." But their interest in competitive athletics went another direction.

Bo also has aspirations of playing college football, while the youngest of the Ruud children, Kim, plays eighth-grade basketball — Barrett also starts for the state's top-ranked Class A basketball team. "We go to sporting events around the clock," Tom said. "We're enjoying the heck out of it."

Nebraska lacks experience and depth at middle linebacker. Junior Jamie Burrow is the most experienced, and freshman T.J. Hollowell will get a look in the middle during spring practice after playing the strongside, so Barrett Ruud probably will be among those who could play as true freshmen in the fall. There will be much to learn in a short time. But at least he'll have the opportunity.

Despite all the recruiting attention, "Barrett has handled it pretty well," said Tom.

"He doesn't get too overwhelmed."

Tom wore jersey No. 45, which was shared by senior tight end John Murphy and sophomore rush end Jemond Smith last season. But he won't encourage Barrett to ask for his number.

"I'm staying out of all that stuff," he said.

This will be Barrett's time. ■

2001 Recruiting Class

Player, hometown (school)	Ht.	Wt.	Pos.
Titus Adams, Omaha (Creighton Prep)	6-4	285	DL
Philip Bland, Lafayette (Fairview), Colo.	6-0	205	ROV
Cliff Brye, Lincoln (Northeast)/Hutchinson (Kan.) CC	5-10	175	WR
Daniel Bullocks, Chattanooga (Hixson), Tenn.	6-2	200	FS
Josh Bullocks, Chattanooga (Hixson), Tenn.	6-2	200	ROV
Seppo Evvaraye, Laurel (Laurel-Concord), Neb.	6-5	325	DL
Antwon Guidry, Campbell (Leigh), Calif.	6-1	185	CB
Jared Helming, Springfield (Kickapoo), Mo.	6-4	275	DL
Richie Incognito, Glendale (Mount. Ridge), Ariz.	6-4	310	OL
Randy Landingham, Sonora, Calif.	6-1	180	CB
Danieal Manning, Corsicana, Texas	6-0	195	CB
Mike McLaughlin, Omaha (Millard North)	6-0	175	QB
Gary Pike, Pueblo (Centennial), Colo.	6-4	280	OL
Cory Ross, Denver (Thomas Jefferson), Colo.	5-7	190	RB
Barrett Ruud, Lincoln (Southeast)	6-2	220	LB
Marques Simmons, Davenport (North), Iowa	5-10	190	RB
Le Kevin Smith, Macon (Stratford Academy), Ga.	6-3	295	DT
Mike Stuntz, Council Bluffs (St. Albert), Iowa	6-2	185	QB

**Capsules compiled
by James Hale**



Titus Adams

Defensive Tackle
Omaha, Neb.
(Creighton Prep)
Height: 6-4
Weight: 285
Speed: 4.8
DOB: Jan. 28,
1983

BENCH: 300 **SQUAT:** 485 **VERTICAL JUMP:** 27

FAVORITE FOOD: Pizza

FAVORITE FOOTBALL PLAYER: Warren Sapp

TEAM RECORD: 12-1 (state runner-up)

BIO: Adams is one of nine Nebraska signees who attended the Big Red Football School.. A 3-year starter, he had a banner senior season, with 81 tackles, seven sacks, 13 tackles for losses and 15 quarterback hurries. As a junior, Adams had 80 tackles, 10 sacks and 12 tackles for losses. He played offensive tackle on short yardage situations. Adams comes from a winning program, with a state championship as a junior and state runner-up this past year. Adams is proud that he comes from a big family. He has an older brother who played his college ball at Wayne State. He also has three younger brother and sisters.

HONORS: Named to the Dream Team by PrepStar Recruiting Magazine as the 16th best defensive lineman in the country; named to the Parade All-America team, SuperSports.com All-America team; earned Rivals100.com All-American honors; two-year Omaha World-Herald All-Nebraska All-State selection and defensive captain in 2000; two-time Lincoln Journal Star Super-State honoree and Defensive Player of the Year in 2000; rated as the 13th best defensive tackle in the country by Rivals100.com.

HIGH SCHOOL COACH TOM JAWORSKI: "Titus is a tremendous talent who is one of the best down line prospects that I have coached in a long time. He has great quickness, and with his size, he is almost impossible for any one blocker to contain. Titus is a leader on our football team and if he continues to progress like he has hear with us he will be a tremendous player at Nebraska."

CHOSE NEBRASKA OVER: Tennessee and Iowa State

WHY TITUS CHOSE NEBRASKA: "I was leaning to Nebraska during the entire recruiting process. Nebraska was really where my dad wanted me to go, and that was the same way with most of my family. Nebraska is a great family atmosphere, and I am from a big family and wanted to stay within that kind of environment. I am very comfortable with the players and coaches."

FRANK SOLICH: "Titus is a player that we have watched and known a lot about for some time. He came to our camp, and we got to know him quite well. We are quite fortunate that such an outstanding prospect lived right in our back yard. He has tremendous speed for a big man, and his quickness is outstanding. We feel Titus has the ability to be a very active defensive tackle for us."

PARENTS: Francis Adams and Jerry and Diane Johnson



Philip Bland

Rover
Lafayette, Colo.
(Fairview)
Height: 6-0
Weight: 205
Speed: 4.5
DOB: Jan. 2,
1983

BENCH: 275 **SQUAT:** 350 **VERTICAL JUMP:** 32

FAVORITE FOOD: Artichokes and T-Bone Steaks

FAVORITE FOOTBALL PLAYER: John Lynch

TEAM RECORD: 9-2 (first round of playoffs)

BIO: Bland is a three-year starter who was one of the most heavily recruited athletes signed by Nebraska. Regarded as a physical free safety, Bland was recruited to play rover by the Huskers. In his sophomore and junior years, Bland went both ways in the secondary and at wide receiver. As a senior, he broke his hand in game four and had to play seven games with a cast on his hand. That injury didn't stop Bland from making 90 tackles and intercepting two passes. Bland's father Rich played safety for Colorado from 1971-1973. Bland is also an excellent baseball talent, earning second team All-League honors last year as an outfielder (.350). He visited Nebraska Dec. 8 and committed Dec. 14. Bland is one of three athletes from Colorado to sign with Nebraska.

HONORS: Named a SuperPrep Magazine All-American as the 38th best defensive back in the country; named to the SuperPrep All-Region team as the 25th best player in the Midlands.

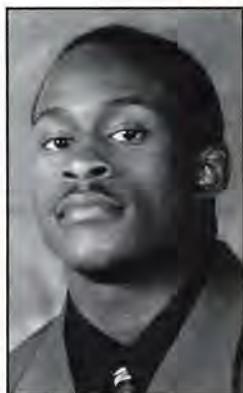
HIGH SCHOOL COACH TOM McCARTNEY: "Philip was the glue that held our team together. He has started here for three years and was a great competitor and a difference maker as a sophomore. Philip played with a broken hand this past year, so we couldn't play him at wide receiver much, but when he is healthy, he is a very good wideout as well. However, his future is at safety, as Philip loves to support the run but has the skill to cover in the secondary as well."

CHOSE NEBRASKA OVER: Colorado, Notre Dame, USC, Colorado State, Washington and Kansas State

WHY PHILIP CHOSE NEBRASKA: "On reputation alone, I felt I was going to Nebraska before I took my visit. However, after my visit, I definitely knew that I was going to play for Nebraska. I was so impressed with the players and coaches and how they treated each other. The respect shown on both sides was amazing, and you could tell there were great positive feelings there. Nebraska said that I could play rover, which is a position that fits my style of play perfectly."

FRANK SOLICH: "We recruited Philip to play our rover position. That is a position that takes an athlete who can really play the run but be athletic enough to cover in some difficult situations. He has to be able to move in space but be physical enough to play like a linebacker sometimes, and we feel that is the kind of player Philip is."

PARENTS: Sarah and Richard Bland



Clifford Brye

Wide Receiver
Lincoln, Neb.
(Northeast)/
Hutchinson
(Kan.) CC
Height: 5-10
Weight: 175
Speed: 4.4

BENCH: 225 **SQUAT:** N/A **VERTICAL JUMP:** 34

TEAM RECORD: 6-4 (second round of playoffs)

BIO: Cliff didn't get the offer he was looking for from Nebraska coming out of Lincoln Northeast High School and headed to Wyoming in 1998. He redshirted at Wyoming in 1988 and then started the next year at running back, rushing for 451 yards, at 5.9 yards per carry. His coach at Wyoming left after the season, and Brye thought about moving with him but decided to try his luck at Hutchinson (Kan.) Community College. He started this past year at wide receiver and had 20 receptions for 344 yards and five touchdowns. Brye picked up 39 yards on two reverses and had 10 kickoff returns for an average of 24.5 yards and one touchdown. Brye will have two years of eligibility remaining.

HONORS: First team All-Nebraska and Super State as a running back at Northeast High School in 1997.

HUTCHINSON COACH DAVID WHEELER: "Cliff is a tremendous athlete who is very smooth when he runs and in his movements. He is a natural athlete who looks like he is running on air. When he can get the ball in the open field or in space, he can really make plays. Cliff is a great special teams return man."

CHOSE NEBRASKA OVER: Only school considered

WHY CLIFFORD CHOSE NEBRASKA: "I am happy that I finally get to play for Nebraska. I didn't get much of an interest from them coming out of high school, but I am glad that things eventually worked out. They really like my speed and quick feet. I could play wide receiver or defensive back for them. I like the offensive side of the ball. I also think I will return punts and kicks for them."

FRANK SOLICH: "Cliff is the only junior college player that we signed, and he fills a need for us as a wide receiver. We feel he can also possibly help us in the return game. Cliff brings great speed to our program, and we are glad that he has decided to return home after starting his career at Wyoming."

PARENT: Wanda Varnadore



Daniel Bullocks

Free Safety
Chattanooga, Tenn.
(Hixson)
Height: 6-2
Weight: 200
Speed: 4.4
DOB: Feb. 28,
1983

BENCH: 285 **SQUAT:** 480 **VERTICAL JUMP:** 35

FAVORITE FOOD: Steak

FAVORITE FOOTBALL PLAYER: Josh Bullocks
TEAM RECORD: 6-4

BIO: Daniel and his brother Josh are the first twins ever signed by Nebraska. Daniel is a four-year starter, and during his time at Hixson, the program experienced more success than ever. Hixson went from being one of the worst prep programs in Tennessee to a playoff contender every season for the last four years. Hixson posted its first winning season in 1997, making the playoffs for the first time in school history. Last season, Daniel rushed for 1,432 yards and 21 touchdowns. He didn't pass much but did complete 11 of 41 passes for 309 yards and five touchdowns. At free safety, Daniel recorded 43 tackles, four interceptions and two fumble recoveries. Daniel returned four kickoffs for 102 yards and four punt returns for 27 yards. Daniel has two older sisters.

HONORS: Honored as the Chattanooga Player of the Year by the Times Free Press; named Mr. Football by the Times Free Press for Class 4A; rated as the 10th best prospect in Tennessee by SuperPrep Magazine; PrepStar Magazine All-Southeast region as the 23rd best defensive back in the region; chosen to play in the Tennessee vs Kentucky All-Star Game; Rated as the fifth best prospect in Tennessee by the Knoxville News-Sentinel; first team All-State by the Associated Press.

HIGH SCHOOL COACH DAN DUFF: "Daniel and his brother are two outstanding football players, but they are different type of players. Daniel was our quarterback and started playing the position as a sophomore from scratch. He didn't know anything about it at the beginning but became an outstanding option quarterback. He also played free safety and has great natural ability there."

CHOSE NEBRASKA OVER: Georgia, Tennessee, Auburn and Mississippi State

WHY DANIEL CHOSE NEBRASKA: "We have always liked Nebraska since we were little and have kind of always wanted to go there. We got tired of being in the South and wanted a change of environment. We wanted to go to school together, and Nebraska was a great place to do that."

FRANK SOLICH: "I am told by Coach Duff that we will be able to tell them apart once we are around them for a while. Right now, I can't tell them apart at all, but I am told if you really look right at them, you can tell some differences. Right now, what I do know is that Daniel is an outstanding football player that has the perfect skills to play free safety. He could probably play some option quarterback for us to, but right now, our plans are to play him on defense."

PARENT: Gerline Williams



Josh Bullocks

Rover

Chattanooga, Tenn.
(Hixson)

Height: 6-2
Weight: 200
Speed: 4.4
DOB: Feb. 28,
1983

BENCH: 275 **SQUAT:** 465 **VERTICAL JUMP:** 35

FAVORITE FOOD: Steak

FAVORITE FOOTBALL PLAYER: Daniel Bullocks

TEAM RECORD: 6-4

BIO: Josh is the brother of Daniel, and they are the first set of twins to sign with Nebraska. Josh is the younger of the two twins by one minute. He was a running back and cornerback for Hixson. Josh carried the ball 99 times for 683 yards and eight touchdowns last season. He also had seven catches for 212 yards and four touchdowns. On defense, Bullocks made 33 tackles, three for losses, had two interceptions and returned a fumble 43 yards for a touchdown. Josh teamed with Daniel on kickoff returns and had 11 for 310 yards and two punt returns for 75 yards. Josh and Daniel run on the Hixson 4X100 relay team, placing second in state and bettering the state record but losing by .01 seconds. Josh and Daniel served as team captains their senior year.

HONORS: Named a starter for the All-Star team that will play in the Tennessee vs. Kentucky All-Star Game; rated as the 15th best overall prospect in Tennessee by the Knoxville News-Sentinel; listed in SuperPrep Magazine as the 11th best prospect in Tennessee; PrepStar Magazine All-Southeast region selection as the No. 24 defensive back.

HIGH SCHOOL COACH DAN DUFF: "Nebraska is not only getting a great pair of athletes but also men of great character. We are very excited about having both of them go to Nebraska. Josh is an outstanding player who played on both sides of the ball. He is a team leader for us and will work hard to do well at Nebraska."

CHOSE NEBRASKA OVER: Tennessee, Auburn, Georgia, Mississippi State and Alabama

WHY JOSH CHOSE NEBRASKA: "The Nebraska program really fit me and my brother better than any other. We wanted to go to the same school together, and we could have done that at all the schools we were considering, but Nebraska seemed the most enthused about it. My mom really liked Nebraska as well, and she is going to move there to be with us. It was important to us that our mom liked our decision."

FRANK SOLICH: "In the Bullock brothers, we have two outstanding young men who are good student athletes. They have been raised well and know how to win. Josh and Daniel are a great addition to our program."

PARENT: Gerline Williams



Seppo Evvaraye

Defensive Tackle
Laurel, Neb.
(Laurel-Concord)

Height: 6-5
Weight: 325
Speed: 5.0
DOB: July 1,
1982

BENCH: 400 **SQUAT:** 600 **VERTICAL JUMP:** n/a

HOBBIES: Football

FAVORITE FOOD: Hamburger

FAVORITE FOOTBALL PLAYER: Warren Sapp

BIO: Evvaraye came to the United States from Finland as a foreign exchange student. He played just one year of club football in Finland before joining the Laurel-Concord team. During Seppo's two years of varsity action, Laurel-Concord won a state title last year and went to the second round of the playoffs two years ago. Evvaraye missed the first three games this past season while appealing a Nebraska School Activities Association ruling that allows foreign exchange students just one year of eligibility. Evvaraye attended the Nebraska camp. Seppo has an older brother Ari and a younger brother Efe. Evvaraye will throw the shot put for the first time this spring.

HONORS: Made All-America team of SuperPrep Magazine as the 33rd best defensive line prospect in the country; listed on the PrepStar Midland squad as the 18th best offensive lineman in the country; rated as the 24th best player in the Midlands by SuperPrep; named to the Omaha World-Herald All-Nebraska first-team as an offensive lineman; earned Super-State honors from the Lincoln Journal Star.

HIGH SCHOOL COACH MICHAEL HALLEY: "Nebraska is going to have a lot of fun with Seppo. They have a fantastic athlete that has his best football ahead of him. He is still learning so much about the game, but his raw skills are tremendous. He has great strength, size, and he can run. He played both ways for us, and I understand that Nebraska wants to start on the defensive side of the ball, but it wouldn't surprise me if he doesn't wind up on offense."

CHOSE NEBRASKA OVER: Only school considered

WHY SEPOO CHOSE NEBRASKA: "I chose Nebraska because of the total football program. If you live in Nebraska, you want to play at Nebraska, and it's that simple. I liked the people, players, coaches and the facilities. I can get a great education at Nebraska as well. Nebraska has a great tradition. Finally, my host parents are going to be close to me and support me throughout my career at Nebraska."

FRANK SOLICH: "We are very excited that Seppo signed and will be playing his college football with us. Physically, he is one of the very best talents that we have, and he comes in really wanting to learn the fundamentals of the game. His high school coach did a great job with him, and we look forward to continuing what was started there."

PARENTS: Host parents Jim and Carla Erwin now share legal guardianship with Sirpa, Seppo's mother



Antwon Guidry

Cornerback
Campbell, Calif.
(Leigh)
Height: 6-1
Weight: 185
Speed: 4.45
DOB: Dec. 31,
1982

BENCH: 240 **SQUAT:** 360 **VERTICAL JUMP:** 32

TEAM RECORD: 9-4

BIO: Guidry was one of the most productive running backs in the country last year, rushing for 1,845 yards and 22 touchdowns. Guidry seemed to do everything at Leigh High School, as he also played quarterback and completed 19 of 27 passes for 717 yards and 11 touchdowns. He also returned two punts, two kick-offs and two interceptions for scores. Guidry was a team captain and rushed for more than 300 yards against Leland. He led Leigh to the state finals, where it lost 28-20. Guidry also earned four letters in basketball and track. He is having a fine senior in basketball, averaging 20 points per game on a team that was 20-2, heading toward the playoffs. He also averages six steals and five assists per game. In track, Guidry has run a 10.6 100 meters and a 21.5 200 meters. Antwon has a brother Ricky and sister Cassandra.

HONORS: The San Jose Mercury News Offensive Player of the Year; named the Leigh High School Player of the Year; first team All-State by the San Jose Mercury-News and from the California High School Coaches Association; PrepStar Recruiting Magazine All-Western Region squad as the 20th best athlete in the region; rated as the second best athlete in the West by PrepStar; rated as the 78th best athlete in the West by SuperPrep Magazine; named an All-America defensive back by Student Sports.

HIGH SCHOOL COACH KEN PADIA: "Antwon sometimes is a blur out the field. He is the fastest player I have ever coached, and we have good speed here. Nebraska is a speed team, and Antwon will fit in there very well. He doesn't like to lose either, and going to Nebraska should help him there as well. I really can't say enough good things about him. He is a very talented young man."

CHOSE NEBRASKA OVER: Fresno State, Idaho, Washington and Colorado

WHY ANTWON CHOSE NEBRASKA: "Nebraska is one of the top football programs in the country, and I felt honored they wanted me to play for them. Their defense is attacking all the time, and that means their corners are constantly in man coverage, putting their skills on the line. That is what I want to do on every play. I want to test myself against the very best, and I can do that at Nebraska."

FRANK SOLICH: "We always try to recruit great speed, and Antwon can really run. He was an excellent running back in high school, but we feel he will be a cornerback for us. Antwon has a great burst, and we feel he can close on a receiver and make up ground."

PARENTS: Michelle and Garry Glaznap



Jared Helming

Defensive Tackle
Springfield, Mo.
(Kickapoo)
Height: 6-4
Weight: 275
Speed: 4.7
DOB: Dec. 23,
1982

BENCH: 390 **SQUAT:** 610 **VERTICAL JUMP:** 22

HOBBIES: Music, sports and hanging with friends

FAVORITE FOOD: Mexican

FAVORITE FOOTBALL PLAYER: Jeremy Slechta

TEAM RECORD: 11-2 (state semifinals)

BIO: Jared is the only player from Missouri to sign with Nebraska this year. His coach, Kurt Thompson, coached Grant and Tracey Wistrom at Webb City, Mo. This past season, Helming had 73 tackles. He had 87 as a junior and 69 as a sophomore. An excellent pass rusher, Helming had 25 tackles for losses, three sacks and an interception in leading Kickapoo to the state semifinals. Helming is a three-time letter-winner in track, winning the shot and discus in the Ozark Conference meet last year. Helming committed to the Huskers at their Big Red Football School. Before making his decision, Helming consulted with former Husker Steve Warren, a Kickapoo graduate who was a third round pick of the Green Bay Packers in 2000. An excellent student, Helming has earned the honor roll for four straight years and carries a 3.8 GPA. Older brother Ryan starts at quarterback at Northern Iowa.

HONORS: Listed as a SuperPrep All-American and the No. 9 offensive lineman in the country; named to PrepStar's All-Midlands Region team as the 22nd best player; Missouri Gatorade Player of the Year; rated as the 10th best defensive lineman by Rivals100.com; two-time Class 5A all-state defensive lineman

HIGH SCHOOL COACH KURT THOMPSON:

"Jared is a very physical player that plays with a tremendous intensity. He has tremendous speed for a down lineman and can run with backs. Jared is one of the best athletes I have ever seen at any position, and I have coached some outstanding players. I think he will have a great career at Nebraska."

CHOSE NEBRASKA OVER: Michigan, Tennessee, Missouri, Kansas, Kansas State, Illinois and Florida State

WHY JARED CHOSE NEBRASKA: "I knew last year that I wanted to go to Nebraska, and all it took was for them to offer me. I love the way Nebraska plays defense and look forward to being a part of their program."

FRANK SOLICH: "We are very glad that Jared is coming into our program. He is a very athletic big man that really fits into what we want to do. We love team speed, and Jared has great speed at his position."

PARENTS: George and Patty Helming



Richie Incognito

**Offensive Lineman
Glendale, Ariz.
(Mountain Ridge)**
Height: 6-4
Weight: 310
Speed: 5.0
**DOB: July 5,
1983**

BENCH: 450 **SQUAT:** 625 **VERTICAL JUMP:** 25 1/2

HOBBIES: Stereo and PlayStation II

FAVORITE FOOD: Pizza

FAVORITE FOOTBALL PLAYER: Dominique Raiola

TEAM RECORD: 8-4 (first round state playoffs)

BIO: Incognito committed to Nebraska back in May of 2000 and is the first Division I football player to sign out of Mountain Ridge, which competes in the state's largest class. A starter on both sides of the ball, Incognito also was the deep snapper. He attended the Big Red Football School last summer. Incognito has earned one letter in track, throwing the shot put and discus. Incognito was born in Englewood, N.J., and moved to Glendale in 1995. With the offense primarily running behind him, Incognito helped lead Mountain Ridge to an 8-4 record and the first round of the state playoffs.

HONORS: Winner of the Brian Murray Award, which goes to the best lineman in Arizona; winner of the Frank Kush award, which goes to the best offensive lineman in Arizona; named to PrepStar Magazine Dream Team as the No. 6 offensive lineman in the country; rated the No. 1 offensive lineman in the West by PrepStar; the No. 5 player in Arizona by SuperPrep Magazine; first team all-state selection by the Arizona Republic and named to its Super All-State team.

HIGH SCHOOL COACH JIM EWAN: "We are only in our fifth year at Mountain Ridge, and Richie is our first Division I recruit. The fact he is going to such a great program like Nebraska is incredible. Richie is an incredible talent and has a tremendous work ethic. I don't see how he can help but have a great career at Nebraska."

CHOSE NEBRASKA OVER: Michigan, Michigan State, USC and Oregon

WHY RICHIE CHOSE NEBRASKA: "Nebraska's reputation of developing offensive linemen is the best in the country. I want to play with the best, and the best offensive line in college football is at Nebraska. The coaches are very attentive to their players' needs, and the Nebraska fans are second to none."

FRANK SOLICH: "Richie was one of the first players to commit to us back in May. We didn't hesitate to offer him. He is almost a prototype of what we want in an offensive lineman. He has great size, strength and super feet. Our coaches look forward to working with him."

PARENTS: Richard and Donna Incognito



Randy Landingham

**Cornerback
Sonora, Calif.**
Height: 6-1
Weight: 180
Speed: 4.4
**DOB: Feb. 23,
1983**

HOBBIES: None

FAVORITE FOOD: Chicken

FAVORITE FOOTBALL PLAYER: Barry Sanders.

TEAM RECORD: 10-1 (lost in first round of playoffs)

BIO: Randy has a twin brother Rodney, who signed with Oregon State. When they report for summer workouts, it will be the first time the brothers have been separated for any length of time. Landingham will play cornerback at Nebraska, but he could play offense as well. This past year, he rushed for 1,400 yards. In his career, he gained more than 3,500 yards. The Landingham twins led Sonora to a 20-3 record over the last two years.

HONORS: Ranked in PrepStar Recruiting Magazine as the 12th best running back in the West and the 25th best player overall in the West Region; listed as the 36th best player in the West, according to SuperPrep Magazine; first team all-conference selection at running back.

HIGH SCHOOL COACH ROBERT CENDRO:

"Teams got to the point that they really didn't want to test Randy. He probably only had three passes caught on him all year. We played him both ways, and he was a 1,000-yard rusher for us. Randy is a very talented person both on and off the field. He has great character and will fit in very well at Nebraska. He is a tough, physical player."

CHOSE NEBRASKA OVER:

Washington

WHY RANDY CHOSE NEBRASKA: "I liked the atmosphere around there, and I feel the coaching staff really cares about their players."

FRANK SOLICH: "Randy went both ways in high school, and he is a talented running back. However, we feel he can be a big corner for us. He is a little taller than most cornerbacks, but he has the feet and the hips for us and could really give us a dimension at cornerback that we don't have very often."

PARENTS: Guardians Eddie and Robert Cendro



Danieal Manning

Cornerback
Corsicana,
Texas
Height: 6-0
Weight: 195
Speed: 4.4
DOB: Aug. 9,
1982

BENCH: 240 **SQUAT:** 390 **VERTICAL JUMP:** 37

TEAM RECORD: 9-4 (regional finals)

BIO: Danieal was a two-way starter who recorded 138 tackles during his career at Corsicana High School. Manning proved his is one of the more opportunistic players in the country, when he made 67 tackles, returned two of his three interceptions for touchdowns and had five fumble recoveries, one of which he returned for a score. A team captain, Manning also returned kickoffs for 213 yards over the last two years and had 192 punt return yards and 215 yards in interception returns. He scored four touchdowns on returns, including a 90-yard kickoff return, a blocked kick return and a 13-yard fumble return. Manning is a blazer in track, where he has run a 4.3 40-yard dash and a 21.4 200 meters. He has marks of 47 feet in the triple jump and 23 feet in the long jump. Manning first committed to Texas A&M, before visiting Nebraska Jan. 12 and changing his commitment to the Huskers.

HONORS: Rated as the 16th best cornerback in the country by Rivals100.com; the 20th best cornerback in the Midlands by PrepStar Magazine; the 117th best player in the Southwest by SuperPrep Magazine; second-team All-State selection by the Associated Press and Texas Sports Writers Association.

HIGH SCHOOL COACH JEFF BERRY: "Danieal is a super young man that can turn on a dime on the football field. We used him at cornerback and in the return game, and Danieal is a threat to make a big play every time he touches the football. He will get bigger and stronger at Nebraska and be very tough at corner. He is a very aggressive player right now."

CHOSE NEBRASKA OVER: Texas A&M, Texas Tech and TCU.

WHY DANIEL CHOSE NEBRASKA: "Nebraska was a great fit for me. It's really as simple as that. I had a chance to go to a lot of good schools, but Nebraska was the best program that I was looking at. I really liked the players and the coaches. Nebraska is one big family."

FRANK SOLICH: "We felt we needed to add some depth at cornerback, and Danieal is the type of player that we feel can help us right away. He has great speed and can really cover. What we really liked about him is that he is always around the football and always looking for the big play."

PARENTS: Tammy and Joe Brown and grandson of Tinnas Manning



Mike McLaughlin

Quarterback
Omaha, Neb.
(Millard North)
Height: 6-0
Weight: 175
Speed: 4.5
DOB: Jan. 27,
1983

BENCH: 250 **SQUAT:** N/A **VERTICAL JUMP:** 33

TEAM RECORD: 5-6 (second round state playoffs)

BIO: McLaughlin was the first athlete to commit to Nebraska in April. He played quarterback at the same school that has produced current Husker quarterback Eric Crouch and teammates Mic Boettner, Judd Davies and Pat Ricketts. A three-year starter, McLaughlin rushed for 3,400 yards and passed for another 800. He rushed for 1,774 yards and 22 touchdowns as a junior. McLaughlin often works out with Crouch when Crouch returns to Millard North. McLaughlin has attended the last three Big Red Football Schools. He runs track as well, and has clocked a 10.72 100 meters and a 21.7 200. McLaughlin also ran on the 4x400-meter relay team that claimed the state title as a junior. McLaughlin was born in Long Island, N.Y.

HONORS: Nebraska Gatorade Player of the Year; named the Class A and All-Nebraska/Super State quarterback by the Omaha World-Herald and Lincoln Journal Star; named to SuperPrep Magazine All-America team as the 17th best quarterback in the country; ranked as the fourth best quarterback in the Midlands by PrepStar Magazine; rated as the 20th best quarterback in the country by Rivals100.com.

HIGH SCHOOL COACH FRED PETITO: "Mike is very similar to Eric Crouch who is now the quarterback at Nebraska and who used to quarterback for us here at Millard North. Mike has been drilled in option football since he was a freshman, and he understands all the little things that make the option so successful. He is tough, quick and has breakaway speed. Mike throws the ball pretty well, too. We run the same option that Nebraska does, so Mike is going to know what he is doing the first day he steps on campus. I think he will have similar success to what Eric is having right now."

CHOSE NEBRASKA OVER: Only school considered

WHY MIKE CHOSE NEBRASKA: "There was no question in my mind where I was going to go to school. I was proud that Nebraska offered me so early, and I was so glad to be the first player to commit to them in this year's class. I am proud of the fact that Nebraska thought enough of me as a future quarterback that they offered me almost a year ahead of time. Nebraska has always been my favorite school, and it has always been a dream of mine to be a Nebraska Cornhusker."

FRANK SOLICH: "We have known about Mike for a couple of years and have watched him very closely. He is an excellent option quarterback with good speed and a good arm. His skills match exactly what we are looking for in a quarterback"

PARENTS: Steve and Gerri McLaughlin



Gary Pike

Offensive Lineman
Pueblo, Colo.
(Centennial)
Height: 6-4
Weight: 280
Speed: 5.1
DOB: Nov. 15,
1982

BENCH: 350 **SQUAT:** 460 **VERTICAL JUMP:** n/a

TEAM RECORD: 2-8

BIO: Pike is one of the top pure athletes to come out of Colorado this year. He started on both sides of the ball the last three years, making 38 tackles this past season with four sacks. His junior season, Pike was in on 87 tackles and had eight sacks. On offense, Pike averaged 11 pancake blocks but didn't play in two games because of a sprained ankle. He committed to the Huskers at the Big Red Football School. Pike started at center for the basketball team as a junior but has decided to hit the weight room and not play this winter. An excellent student, Pike ranks in the top 15 of his class and carries a 3.85 GPA. He is a three-year member of the National Honor Society. Pike was named the math and science student of the year at Centennial.

HONORS: Super Prep All-American and ranked as the 19th best offensive lineman in the country; PrepStar Magazine All-Region selection as the 19th best player in the Midlands; ranked as the 30th best offensive lineman in the country by Rivals100.com; selected first team all-state by the Rocky Mountain News and Denver Post; named to the Post 2001 Blue Chip List.

HIGH SCHOOL COACH TROY NICCOLI: "Gary is a dominating type of offensive lineman that controls the line of scrimmage from the very first play on. He has developed into an excellent pass blocker, but what he really does is drive defenders off the ball. He will get bigger and stronger at Nebraska, and he has a tremendous upside to him."

CHOSE NEBRASKA OVER: Colorado, Colorado State, Stanford and Kansas State.

WHY GARY CHOSE NEBRASKA: "I liked the stability and the longevity of the coaching staff. The family atmosphere was outstanding, and I want the opportunity to play for a national championship. Nebraska is so consistently ranked in the top five every year that I figure I will have more than one crack at winning a national title."

FRANK SOLICH: "Gary is a player that played on both sides of the ball. He could probably be used as a defensive player if you wanted to use him that way. He also showed great mobility. We had both of those guys in our camp (Pike and Richie Incognito), so we got a chance to work with them first hand. Beyond seeing their talent on film, we were also able to see their talent in person."

PARENTS: Gary Sr. and Leslie Pike



Cory Ross

Running Back
Denver, Colo.
(T. Jefferson)
Height: 5-7
Weight: 190
Speed: 4.4
DOB: Sept. 22,
1982

BENCH: 225 **SQUAT:** 400 **VERTICAL JUMP:** 36

BIO: Ross committed in the summer, then wavered, then settled back in October. One selling point for Nebraska was that they recruited him as a running back from the start, and that is where Ross wants to play. Ross has talent with the ball under his arm, rushing for 1,543 yards and 23 touchdowns. However, Ross is more dangerous on returns, where he had 12 touchdowns, six on kickoffs and six on punts. Ross led the state in total offense with an incredible 3,700 yards. He's not bad on defense either, picking off five passes and finishing third on the team in tackles with 87. As a junior, Ross rushed for 986 yards and 13 touchdowns. Ross was awarded the Spartan Award for dedication, teamwork and sacrifice. He played almost every skill position on the field. A four-year letterman in track, Ross also played varsity basketball for two years. He has run a 10.5 100 meters. His older brother Roger played wide receiver for Kansas this fall.

HONORS: Earned All-America honors from SuperPrep Magazine as the 17th best athlete in the country. Rated as the fourth best defensive back in the Midlands by PrepStar Magazine; Rivals100.com lists Ross as the 12th best cornerback; Denver Post 2001 Blue Chip; first team all-state the past two years; named to the Colorado All-Star team that will play in the National High School All-Star game in Texas.

HIGH SCHOOL COACH TIM CROSS: "We always have a number of great athletes that come out of here, and Cory is one of the very best. He is not very big, but he is quick and can flat run by you. He is not afraid to run inside, and on defense, he is a tremendous cover corner. He is a natural cover defender. I know he likes offense, and he will be very good there, but if he wanted to, he could make a living someday at cornerback."

CHOSE NEBRASKA OVER: Colorado, Kansas, Kansas State, Miami and Washington.

WHY CORY CHOSE NEBRASKA: "When I went to camp at Nebraska, it just seemed like home to me. I felt so comfortable. I liked how the players were treated by the coaches and the fans. The atmosphere is so great for college football. I think it is the best place to play a college football game."

FRANK SOLICH: "We recruited only two running backs, and that was because we really like the talent in Ross. Ross is very quick and fast and hits the hole incredibly fast. I was really impressed with Cory during the recruiting process because he had other schools calling him up until signing day and stuck with us. That took some conviction on his part."

PARENTS: Roger Ross and Gale Frazier



Barrett Ruud

Linebacker
Lincoln, Neb.
(Southeast)
Height: 6-2
Weight: 220
Speed: 4.6
DOB: March 20,
1983

BENCH: 280 **SQUAT:** 529 **VERTICAL JUMP:** N/A

TEAM RECORD: 13-0 (Class A state champion)

BIO: Barrett is the son of Tom Ruud, who played linebacker at Nebraska (1972-74). Uncles Bob Martin (1973-75) and John Ruud (1978-79) also played at Nebraska as did great-grandfather Clarence Swanson (1918-21). Barrett Ruud played both running back and linebacker in helping lead Lincoln Southeast to a state championship last fall. Ruud committed early, so there was no suspense to his recruiting. A four-year letterman, Ruud helped Southeast to a 48-2 record, including state championship in 1997, 1998 and 2000. He also plays basketball, starting at forward for the No. 1-ranked Knights. He averages about 9 points and 5 rebounds. Ruud is also a good student. He has earned academic all-state honors and is a member of the National Honor Society. Ruud attended the Big Red Football Camp. He took an unofficial visit to Notre Dame but only visited Nebraska officially. Ruud has a sister Kim and a brother Bo.

HONORS: Two-time All-Nebraska/Super-State honoree by both the Omaha World-Herald and the Lincoln Journal Star; named World-Herald honorary captain on offense; Journal Star offensive player of the year; earned PrepStar Magazine All-Region honors as the fourth best linebacker in the Midlands; rated as the 34th best player in the Midlands by SuperPrep Magazine; named the USA Today Nebraska Player of the Year; Named Honorary Captain of the offense, while the Lone Star Journal named him the Offensive Player of the Year;

HIGH SCHOOL COACH CHUCK MIZERSKI:

"Barrett was a great football player for us over the past few years. We are really going to miss him because he was so good on both sides of the ball. He was a great team leader for us as well, and he will be hard to replace. He will give Nebraska everything he has, and his determination will get him over the top."

WHY RUUD CHOSE NEBRASKA: "I have grown up my whole life wanting to play for Nebraska. It just didn't make any sense looking around, when I knew what I wanted to do. Nebraska was the best situation for me both athletically and academically."

FRANK SOLICH: "Barrett's dad Tom player here at Nebraska. He (Barrett) was an excellent player on both sides of the ball for Southeast, but we really think he will be a linebacker for us."

CHOSE NEBRASKA OVER: No other schools considered

PARENTS: Tom and Jaime Ruud



Marques Simmons

Running Back
Davenport, Iowa
(North)
Height: 5-10
Weight: 190
Speed: 4.4
DOB: Aug. 1,
1982

BENCH: 250 **SQUAT:** 410 **VERTICAL JUMP:** N/A

TEAM RECORD: 0-9

BIO: Simmons didn't announce where he was going to school until signing with Nebraska. Blessed with pure speed at 10.4 in the 100 meters, Simmons rushed for 4,238 yards during his career. This past year, Simmons was outstanding, rushing for 1,788 yards and 10 touchdowns. That bettered his junior year, when he rushed for 1,335 yards, breaking Iowa star Tavian Banks's rushing records. Simmons accomplished all this on a team that failed to win a game. He plans to run track at Nebraska, after winning the Drake Relays in the 100 meters the last two years. He posted an electronic time of 10.63 last year, bettering a 12-year old record. Simmons also ran a 21.44 in the 200 meters. Simmons's father, Clancy, is the principal at Davenport Central, and his mother, Diane, is the coordinator of student teachers at the University of Northern Iowa. Clancy Simmons was one of the top track athletes in Iowa history, competing in the sprints and jumps. He was a member of the U.S. Olympic team and posted a 53-foot best in the triple jump. He also played professional baseball in the minor leagues.

HONORS: Earned All-America honors from SuperPrep Magazine as the 40th best running back in the country; rated as the 8th best running back in the Midwest by PrepStar Magazine; ranked as the 26th best prospect in the Midlands by SuperPrep Magazine; member of the Des Moines Register Elite team and first team All-State selection.

HEAD COACH MARK BLOOM: "We have had some very talented running backs come through our campus before, and Marques certainly ranks right up there with the very best. Marques has great field vision and has the speed to run away from defenders. He's a real disciplined kid and loves work out on his own. I never had to worry about him getting ready for a game."

CHOSE NEBRASKA OVER: Iowa State and Iowa

WHY MARQUES CHOSE NEBRASKA: "It was a tough decision for me on signing day, but in the end, I really liked the Nebraska offense and its great tradition of running the football. Nebraska tailbacks are the main men in the offense, and I feel I have the ability to be that kind of guy."

FRANK SOLICH: "We felt that running back was an important position for us this year, and we were fortunate to get an outstanding talent like Marques on signing day. We liked Marques as a tailback and feel he has the skill to be an outstanding talent. To get Marques on signing day was very fortunate for us."

PARENTS: Clancy and Diane Simmons



Le Kevin Smith

Defensive Tackle

Macon, Ga.

(Stratford Academy)

Height: 6-3

Weight: 295

Speed: 5.0

DOB: July 21, 1982

BENCH: 340 SQUAT: 580 VERTICAL JUMP: 28

TEAM RECORD: 12-2 (state champion)

BIO: Smith's decision came right down to signing day, and he picked the Huskers over Florida State. Smith was a big reason why Stratford Academy won the last two Class 3A state titles. Last year as a senior, Smith registered 87 tackles, including 45 solo, 20 tackles for losses, two fumbles caused and four fumbles recovered, including one he returned for a touchdown. He also broke up one pass, had one interception, 13 quarterback hurries and a blocked punt which he returned 48 yards for a touchdown. Both Smith's touchdown came in the opening game of the season against Tattnall Square. Smith lettered four years in track and has won the state championship in the discus three straight years. He is also the defending champion in the shot put. Smith's best mark in the discus is 171-0.

HONORS: Macon Touchdown Club Lineman of the Year and Player of the Year; USA Today Georgia Player of the Year; ranked as the No. 5 defensive lineman in the Southeast by PrepStar Magazine; earned All-America honors from Rivals100.com as the 14th best defensive lineman in the country.

HIGH SCHOOL COACH RODNEY COLLINS: "Le Kevin played a big role in our state championship this past year. He was a dominating force along the defensive line and gave us a very strong presence up front. He has great hands, and with his strength, it looks like he just tosses players to the side. He is very quick and agile and plays with a determination you don't always see at this level."

SMITH CHOSE NEBRASKA OVER: Florida State, Auburn, Georgia, Georgia Tech, Colorado and Arkansas

WHY Le KEVIN CHOSE NEBRASKA: "Recruiting was very hard me, and I had a very hard time making up my mind. But in the end, I think Nebraska had the best overall program for me. Every time I would think about it, Nebraska would pop into my head. I really liked the weight room and the tremendous support Nebraska had for its football players in so many different areas."

FRANK SOLICH: "Le Kevin had some tough choices to make at the end, and we are real proud that he chose to play his college football at Nebraska. Getting just a great talent on signing day gave our class a tremendous boost."

PARENT: Kimberly Smith



Mike Stuntz

Quarterback

Council Bluffs, Iowa

(St. Albert)

Height: 6-2

Weight: 185

Speed: 4.5

DOB: Nov. 23, 1982

BENCH: 250 SQUAT: 400 VERTICAL JUMP: 36

BIO: Stuntz has been the starting quarterback the last two years at St. Albert and led it to a 30-4 record. A left-hander, Stuntz passed for 425 yards as a senior and had 1,065 yards rushing. Stuntz also had 425 yards in returns for 1,909 yards of total offense. He reached the end zone 18 times rushing and threw six touchdown passes. In three years, Stuntz had 1,713 yards rushing, 990 yards passing and 1,040 return yards. As a sophomore, Stuntz started at wide receiver, while his older brother Tony was the quarterback. Stuntz is also a three-year letterman and the starting shooting guard the last two years in basketball. He started in soccer as a freshman, sophomore and junior but did not play this season. Stuntz attended the Big Red Football School last summer and committed on June 28. He was named to the all-district academic team and he carries a 3.96 GPA. Stuntz's parents and two brothers all attended the University of Iowa. He will rejoin former teammate and friend Blanchard Johnson III, who is a linebacker at Nebraska.

HONORS: Named an All-American by SuperPrep Magazine as the No. 13 quarterback in the country; ranked as the ninth best player in the Midlands by SuperPrep Magazine; rated as the No. 1 athlete in the Midwest by PrepStar Magazine; listed as the 32nd best quarterback in the country by Rivals100.com; named first team All-State as a defensive back; named to the Omaha World-Herald All-Western Iowa team and All-Omaha area team.

HIGH SCHOOL COACH JIM DUGGAN: "Mike is a tremendous athlete that has played a number of skill positions for us throughout his career. He could be a great quarterback, wide receiver or defensive back. This is why I am thrilled that he is going to Nebraska because they use very athletic quarterbacks in their system and win a bunch of games with the style of quarterback that Mike is."

CHOSE NEBRASKA OVER: Iowa, Iowa State and Texas A&M

WHY MIKE CHOSE NEBRASKA: "I really fit the system at Nebraska, and my skills will be best used there. Nebraska has always been a winner, and that makes the decision easier. I went to their camp, and I have always been a big fan of their program. It is just the place for me."

FRANK SOLICH: "Mike Stuntz has really only played quarterback the last two years at St. Albert. Prior to that, he was a receiver. We think he is an excellent running/throwing quarterback. Mike has been recruited as a defensive back by many schools. Of course, with our style of offense, we recruited Mike as a quarterback."

PARENTS: Wendell and Lyn Stuntz

2001 Big 12 Recruiting

Show of Power

***Big 12 success
carries over
into recruiting***

By James Hale

The Big 12 Conference proved to be the toughest league in college football last season.

Oklahoma won the national title, and Nebraska and Kansas State finished in the top 10. Texas and Iowa State were also ranked, giving the Big 12 five teams in the final top 25s.

This year in recruiting, the conference once again flexed its muscles, as three of its teams were ranked among the top 10 by various recruiting services.

Here are this writer's rankings of the Big 12 classes and a brief review of each team.

1 OKLAHOMA: The Sooners played off their national championship season by signing a class that many feel is in the top three in the country. The Sooners needed linemen on both sides of the ball and signed the nation's top defensive tackle in Tommie Harris of Killeen (Ellison), Texas, and junior college All-America offensive lineman Clint Werth of Garden City (Kan.) CC. OU also signed one of the top running back classes and top linebacker classes in the country. Wide receiver Brandon Jones of Texarkana (Liberty-Eylau), Texas, is a national top-100 player.

2 TEXAS: The Longhorns added another star-studded class headed by All-America running back Cedric Benson of Midland (Lee), Texas. Many believe that offensive lineman Jonathan Scott of Dallas (Carter) is the best in the country. Wide receiver Quan Cosby of Mart, Texas, is an All-American



and top-100 talent nationally, as is linebacker Derrick Johnson of Waco, Texas. The Longhorns signed eight offensive linemen.

3 NEBRASKA: The Cornhuskers needed to add depth at quarterback, and they signed two of the top run/pass signal callers in the country in Mike McLaughlin of Omaha (Millard North) and Mike Stuntz of Council Bluffs (St. Albert), Iowa. Running back Cory Ross of Denver (Thomas Jefferson), Colo., is a talented scat-back, and the Huskers added All-American tailback Marques Simmons of Davenport, Iowa. Defensive tackles Titus Adams of Omaha (Creighton Prep), Jared Helming of Springfield (Kickapoo), Mo., and Le Kevin Smith of Macon (Stratford Academy), Ga., are all All-American prospects.

4 KANSAS STATE: The Wildcats put together their most highly rated recruiting class in years, landing in the top 15. Junior college All-America cornerback Bobby Walker of Trinity Valley (Texas) CC is KSU's top recruit. The Wildcats were able to go into Oklahoma and sign All-America wide receiver Jerome Janet of Tulsa (Union). All-American Ayo Saba of Blackwood (Highland), N.J., is the No. 1 fullback prospect in the country.

5 TEXAS A&M: The Aggies are struggling to hang with the big boys of the Big 12 in recruiting but still managed to land in the back end of the nation's top 25. The class got a tremendous boost when All-American offensive lineman Jami Hightower of Jacksonville,

Texas, picked the Aggies late over Texas. Defensive end Lawrence Hooper of Houston (Aldine) is a consensus prep All-American. Quarterback Jason Carter of Bay City, Texas, has a big time arm.

6 TEXAS TECH: The Red Raiders were very aggressive under first year Coach Mike Leach and secured a very talented group of junior college players. Wide receiver Anton Paige of Northwest Mississippi JC is one of the top 10 players in the country. Wide receiver Armon Dorrough of Lancaster is a top-50 talent in Texas.

7 COLORADO: The Buffaloes didn't hold all the top players instate, but they were able to go out to California and once again strike gold. Quarterback Robert Hodge of El Camino JC is one of the top two quarterbacks in junior college football. Cornerback Omar Stewart of College of the Canyons is the No. 1 JUCO prospect at his position.

8 KANSAS: The Jayhawks surprised many with a very respectable class. Offensive

lineman John Harvey of Mesa (Ariz.) Community College is an All-America selection. Defensive end Deshawn Spivy of Kansas City (Washington), Kan., is highly regarded. Running back Marshall Chiles of El Reno, Okla., rushed for more than 2,000 yards.

9 MISSOURI: The Tigers didn't have the overall class they would have liked, but they certainly had their moments. Wide receiver Thomson Ombaga of Grand Prairie, Texas, and running back Damien Nash of East St. Louis, Ill., are two prep All-America skill players the Tigers desperately need. Marcus King of Irving (Nimitz), Texas, is a 10.3 sprinter at either cornerback or wide receiver.

10 IOWA STATE: The Cyclones always seem to be fighting an uphill battle, but a successful season did land Iowa State a couple of gems. Quarterback Seneca Wallace of Sacramento (Calif.) City College may have been the best JUCO signal caller in the country. Defensive end Beau Coleman of Southwestern (Calif.) Community College may have been

the best at his position. The high school class signed by the Cyclones, however, is not highly rated.

11 OKLAHOMA STATE: New Coach Les Miles will be an excellent recruiter in time, but the Cowboys struggled with a little over a month to work with. Kabina Amoo of NEO, Okla., is one of the top JUCO cornerbacks in the country and returns to OSU after signing with the Cowboys out of high school. Quarterback Josh Fields of Stillwater is an excellent signee, if he doesn't opt for pro baseball this summer. If he stays with the Cowboys, he will continue to throw to wide receiver Leonard Jones of Stillwater.

12 BAYLOR: The Bears continue to struggle in recruiting and on the field in the Big 12 Conference. Offensive lineman Abe Robinson of Jersey Village, Texas, is an All-American and the top signee for the Bears. Offensive Antoine Murphy of William Rainey Harper College, Ill., is also highly thought of. However, the rest of the class draws a low rating almost across the board. ■

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HOOPS

Improved in Middle

Sanderford says confidence is key to Leonhardt's success

Senior Casey Leonhardt has been the Nebraska women's team's most consistent player, if not their only consistent player. "I wish she could get some consistent play around her," said Coach Paul Sanderford.

"But she's been solid for us. I really am pleased for her. She's gotten 15, 16 points every night. She's getting six or seven, eight, nine rebounds. She's shooting 58 or 59 percent from the field."

"I think she's definitely a much improved player over a year ago, and I think 90 percent of that is confidence. She's not rushing. She's not missing chippers that she's missed in the past."

Midway into conference play, Sanderford said Leonhardt needed to get more shots if the Huskers hoped to be successful. "If you're willing to throw it to her, you can play, too," he said.

Sophomore Paige Sutton showed during a 92-70 loss against Iowa State at the Sports Center in early February that she could help Leonhardt by hitting a career-high five 3-point shots.

"I think Paige Sutton is emerging as an emotional leader on the floor," Sanderford said of the 6-foot-2 forward-center afterward. "I think she has good leadership qualities. I think she adds some stability. I'd prefer that it would be in the backcourt, but right now, it's not in the backcourt."

"I look for Paige to do some little things that we need to



Paige Sutton



Senior center Casey Leonhardt is Nebraska's leader in scoring and rebounding.

get done. I think she has taken on some of that responsibility, especially as an emotional leader. It didn't surprise me at all."

Sutton had made only three 3-point shots in 20 previous games.

"She allows us to play four people on the perimeter and try to isolate Casey in the post a little more," said Sanderford. "If that person can shoot the basketball, especially the 3, it frees up the middle some."

Sutton has "pretty good skills besides being 6-1 or 6-2," he said. "Paige has worked really hard on her conditioning level and reactions. I've been pleased with her development."

"I just wish that I had gone to her earlier. I think we might be a better basketball team." ■

Collier Looks for More from Ffriend

Even though Kimani Ffriend has established himself among the best players in the Big 12, Coach Barry Collier has held the senior center from Kingston, Jamaica, to a high standard.

Ffriend played a key role in the Cornhuskers' 85-79 victory against Missouri at the Sports Center in late January, scoring 20 points and pulling down 16 rebounds.

Ffriend had 10 offensive rebounds to the Tigers' six. And though he has been hitting less than 50 percent of his free throws this season, he made 10-of-13 against Missouri.

"Kimani played with great intensity . . . very inspired play," Collier said after Nebraska reversed a 68-66 loss at Missouri to open conference play. "I thought he was really relentless on the boards."

Three games later, however, in a three-point loss against Colorado at the Sports Center, Collier kept Ffriend on the bench for the final 10 minutes. Ffriend, the Big



Kimani Ffriend

12 leader in field goal percentage, finished the game with no points, taking only one shot from the field, and three rebounds.

Collier also replaced Ffriend in the starting lineup for the Oklahoma State game.

Redshirted freshman Brian Conklin started in place of Ffriend.

Collier was displeased with Ffriend's rebounding and defense against Colorado. "It's obvious in the statistics the lack of his scoring," Collier said prior to the Oklahoma State game.

"But what hurt us even four times over was the rebounding, lack of rebounding, and the defensive challenge that he could present to the other team's big guy."

At his best, Ffriend can be an imposing defensive presence. "He's like having 'Shaq' sitting under the basket," Collier said, referring to the Los Angeles Lakers' Shaquille O'Neal.

Ffriend responded to Collier's challenge with 15 points and eight rebounds in 25 minutes of action off the bench in the 78-75 overtime victory against Oklahoma State. ■

RIM SHOTS

Notes And Quotes From The Basketball World

BELCHER'S BEST, AND WORST

Cookie Belcher turned in an outstanding performance in the Cornhuskers' victory against Oklahoma State. The senior guard from Mexico, Mo., scored a game-high 27 points, hitting 4-of-5 shots from 3-point range. He grabbed six rebounds, had eight steals and was credited with seven assists.

Three weeks earlier, Belcher struggled in a 60-59 loss against Iowa State at the Sports Center, scoring 10 points on 4-of-12 shooting from the field, with six turnovers and only one steal.



Cookie Belcher

Officials had to review the winning shot on a television replay to make sure it had been released before time expired. The confusion at game's end led to Nebraska fans running onto the court in celebration before the review, which then set off an Iowa State celebration.

Two days later, at the Cornhusker basketball team's weekly news conference, Belcher still took responsibility for the one-point loss. "The way I played was horrible," he said.

Belcher wasn't obsessed with the game's finish. "I've seen it a couple of times on (ESPN) SportsCenter," he said. "That was enough for me. I didn't really want to look at it any more. I kind of knew what happened. I don't know. I thought of different options we could have done."

"You can always say, 'If he had missed that shot, then it was a great defensive play or a great defensive stand.' But it didn't go that way . . . so (you) just try to let it go."

MEN'S EARLY COMMITMENTS

Roy Enright and Jason Dourisseau, juniors at Omaha Burke High, have made oral commitments to accept basketball scholarships from Nebraska in November.

The 6-foot-4, 170-pound Dourisseau announced his intention in late January, joining the 6-foot-9, 240-pound Enright, who committed to the Cornhuskers last April.

Enright's commitment is believed to be the earliest in Nebraska basketball history.

Dourisseau has the potential "to be a really good one," Burke coach Gary Graner told the Omaha World-Herald. "Jason is very versatile and has a real good head for the game."

Creighton and Iowa State also recruited Dourisseau.

Four players have signed letters of intent to play with the Cornhuskers next season: 6-foot-11 Dan Heimos from Waterloo, Ill.; 6-foot-4 Jake Mulheisen from Lincoln, Neb., and 6-foot-5 Corey Simms from St. Louis, as well as 6-foot-2 Brennan Clemons, a junior college transfer.

Collier reportedly is looking to add one more player to next season's recruiting class, which would mean that he would have only one scholarship remaining for the 2002 class.

The World-Herald has reported that Nebraska has offered a scholarship for the 2002-03 season to Wes Wilkinson, a 6-foot-9 junior center at Grand Island, Neb., High School.

The Cornhuskers will lose five seniors from this year's team: Cookie Belcher, Steffon Bradford, Rodney Fields, Kimani Ffriend and Craig Wortmann.

Freshman Marques McCarty is redshirting this season, as are Danai Young and Ross Buckendahl, both of whom are injured.

Buckendahl walked on at Nebraska but played last season on scholarship.

OPTIONAL OVERTIME

Junior guard Cary Cochran was by himself, working on his shooting, when Barry Collier left the Devaney Sports Center in the early evening one day in late January.

"I told him he was doing a good job," said Collier. "He said he wondered if he should keep shooting (in games). I said, 'Well, I'll sit you down if you don't keep shooting.'

"So I think he was kind of excited about that. We want him to get his feet set and shoot the ball. We need to create opportunities for him, and he's got to stay very active."

Cochran was hitting better than 46 percent from 3-point range midway through the conference season.



Cary Cochran

MEN'S ROAD LOSING STREAK ENDS

The game might not have been aesthetically pleasing, but the Cornhuskers snapped an 18-game losing streak on the road by defeating Kansas State 63-61 at Manhattan.

Cookie Belcher and Kimani Ffriend combined to score 28 points, and Ffriend pulled down 14 rebounds as Nebraska won a road game for the first time since a 64-59 victory at Kansas on Feb. 10, 1999. The Cornhuskers did win six games at neutral sites during the streak.

OFTEN OVERLOOKED

Senior forward Steffon Bradford, among the Cornhuskers' steadiest performers, has led the team in rebounds and has been one of three players to average in double-figure scoring.

When the team has been successful, it has been because "we just play together," Bradford said. "We're starting to understand one another more and respect each other more than last year. Last year, we didn't care about each other. So this year it's more like a family."

HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

Brian Carr, Rich King, Floyd Ebaugh and George Andreas were inducted into the Nebraska men's basketball hall of fame at halftime of the Colorado game on Feb. 3.

Carr, who played from 1984 to 1987, is the only Cornhusker in history to score 1,000 points and make 600 assists. His 682 assists are the Nebraska career record.

At 7-foot-2, King, who played from 1988 to 1991, is the tallest player in school history. He earned All-America honorable mention after averaging 15.5 points and 8.1 rebounds for Coach Danny Nee's 26-8 NCAA Tournament team in 1990-91. King also blocked 68 shots that season.

Ebaugh played center from 1936 to 1938, on teams coached by William H. Browne. Four teammates also are in the hall of fame: Bob Parsons, George Wahlquist, Elmer Dohrmann and Paul Amen.

Andreas, a volunteer in the Devaney Sports Center's administrative offices, received the hall's special merit award. Andreas died as a result of injuries suffered in a fall following the Alamo Bowl game.

DOUBLE LOSS

The Husker women lost a school-record fifth consecutive home game in their rematch against Colorado, falling to the Buffaloes 81-65 at the Sports Center in mid-February.

Afterward, Coach Paul Sanderford announced that guard Isha Kelley was leaving the team and would be transferring. Kelley, a sophomore from Lincoln, Neb., Southeast High School and the daughter of former Cornhusker baseball pitcher Anthony Kelley, had started seven games. ■

New Track

Nebraska's indoor track and field teams are now competing on a new hydraulic-banked track in the Bob Devaney Sports Center. The new 200-meter track is part of a \$2.9 million renovation.



Scott Bruhn

A Fast Start

Sprinter Owusu's expectations change after first meet on new track

By Mark Derowitsch

All Nebraska's Lesley Owusu wanted out of her final season as a Cornhusker was to run a sub-53 second 400-meter dash.

Two meets, and only one 400, into the indoor season, Owusu had to readjust her goals.

Not that she minded.

During the very first meet on Nebraska's new, hydraulic-banked indoor track at the Bob Devaney Sports Center, Owusu achieved her target time, winning the 400 in a personal-best time of 52.72 seconds. At the time, it was the fastest mark in the nation run by a female college athlete, and it bettered her previous best by nearly two seconds.

Part of Owusu's improvement can be traced directly to the Huskers' new indoor oval, part of a \$2.9 million renovation project to the track. There are only three other tracks like like



Lesley Owusu, a senior sprinter from Slough, Berkshire, England, is a three-time All-American.

Nebraska's 200-meter banked facility in the nation and only seven in the world. It also has the largest radius (67 feet) of any indoor track in the world.

"This could very well become the fastest track in the world," Nebraska Coach Gary Pepin said. "The events around the oval, particularly like the 200 meters or the 400 meters or the 600, you will see some tremendous world-class performances. When all of the big boys get in here for the Big 12

Championships, you'll just see some awesome performances in here.

"The higher the level of people who come here and compete, the greater performances you'll see."

Which makes Owusu's debut performance on the track even more impressive. She broke 53 seconds basically running by herself during a quadrangular meet against Colorado, Kansas State and NCAA Division II Abilene Christian.

The rest of the competitors kept up with Owusu through the first 250 meters, before the Husker senior from Slough, Berkshire, England, pulled away.

"Everybody started out pretty easy, and I wasn't trying to let it all out because I wanted to save something for the 200 later on," she said. "If somebody were there to push me, I think I could have run even faster."

Most of the credit for her impressive start to the indoor season goes directly to Owusu. She came into the indoor season in great shape, despite the fact the Huskers didn't have a normal training routine during the off-season while work was being done on the track.

The Husker sprinters trained at the old Mushroom Gardens, located underneath the east grandstand at Memorial Stadium, outside when the weather cooperated or across town at

Nebraska Wesleyan.

Still, when the gun sounded to open the indoor season, Owusu was ready.

"There is absolutely some effect because of the track, but that girl has worked harder than just about anybody I've ever seen in my life," said Nebraska assistant coach Steve Smith, who works with the Husker sprinters. "She deserves to get a lot out of her senior year."

The next week, Owusu proved her time wasn't just a one-shot wonder. Competing at the Tyson Invitational in Fayetteville, Ark., she placed second in the 400, going up against some of the top athletes in the country. The only runner to beat Owusu was South Carolina's Demetria Washington, currently the NCAA leader in the event.

"Lesley ran a solid race against great competition," Pepin said. "It's good to see her finish so strong among the nation's best."

It probably didn't shock many around the Husker camp. Owusu entered the season as a three-time All-American sprinter, who placed eighth in the 400 during the outdoor national meet last season. She also ran a leg on the Huskers' 4-x-400 relay team that

placed sixth during the indoor season.

This year, what mattered to the Huskers is that Owusu's time automatically earned her a spot in the NCAA Indoor Track and Field Championships, which will be held March 9-10 in Fayetteville. She was the first Husker athlete to break the automatic qualifying standard this indoor season.

Owusu, however, is more concerned about what she can do at the national meet. Breaking her personal record so early in the season has her thinking about doing it again, this time when it matters most.

"Last year, it took almost all season to break 54 seconds, and once I did, it gave me a lot of confidence," she said. "Now that I've broken 53, maybe I can go for 51 seconds. I know I can go faster than that."

It would probably be a good idea for track fans to keep an eye on Owusu throughout the season. Even though she worked hard to get ready for her final indoor year of eligibility, Owusu figures to be even better when she heads outdoors in the spring.

"I think I'll be a different runner outdoors," she said. ■



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Perfect Leader

Captain's role fits Karaica after comeback

By Todd Henrichs

Even in the controlled environment of the Devaney Sports Center pool, Beth Karaica remembers feeling as if she were swimming upstream.

"I was just thrashing around in the water," said Karaica, a fifth-year senior on the Nebraska women's team. "I remember trying so hard, and I couldn't go anywhere. Even my coach said he knew something was wrong."

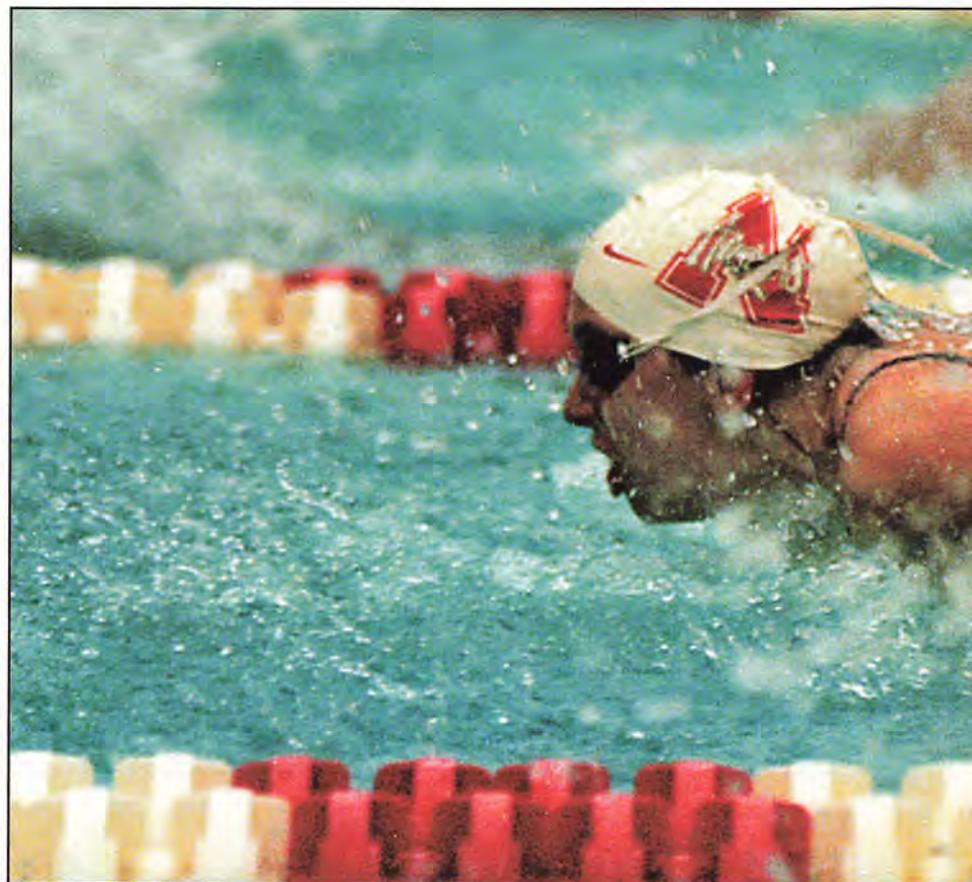
It was one of the first warning signs for Karaica, an outwardly healthy collegiate athlete seemingly prepared to strongly finish an already successful career. Her paces in workouts had reached personal-best levels, "awesome" by her own description. But as the level of fatigue increased in September of 1999, so did the question marks.

What could be wrong?

Ten weeks, 27 lost pounds and a blood test later, Karaica finally received some answers. Doctors diagnosed Epstein-Barr, a viral infection characterized by the severe fatigue associated with mononucleosis. She was banned from physical activity for nearly three months and spent what was supposed to be her senior season sleeping as many as 16 hours a day.

A year later, some of the symptoms remain, along with Karaica's dogged determination to persevere. After taking a redshirt season, Karaica is leading NU as a co-captain this year. She ranks among the national leaders in freestyle events, even as she struggles with more blood tests and the illness' long-range effects which doctors say could last a lifetime.

"Some days I'll be sick — nauseous and migraines — and then some days there's nothing wrong with me," Karaica said. "It could be one day out of a week and then the next week it



Senior All-American Beth Karaica ranks among Nebraska's all-time leaders in the 50- and 100-yard freestyle, as well as the 100 butterfly.

could be five days out of the week. There's no method to the madness.

"That's why I've kind of adjusted things. Maybe sacrificing things a little bit in training will help me make a longer season out of it."

The finish line is the NCAA Women's Championships March 15-17 in Long Island, N.Y.

A native of Pennsylvania, Karaica ranks among Nebraska's all-time top five in the 50- and 100-yard freestyle events, as well as the 100 butterfly. Most of her best performances have come in relay events.

More than anything else, that team-first concept is what drives Karaica to keep coming back. Amid the turbulence of her illness and the startling suspension of NU head coach Cal Bentz and several assistants just prior to the season, Karaica easily could have called it quits this year.

"It's crossed my mind," she said. "But we came into the year already

being short on people. And being a captain, it's pretty much my duty to stay."

Fellow co-captain Shandra Johnson of Omaha is already out for the season while recovering from back surgery.

Bentz ultimately retired, as officials at NU investigated possible NCAA rules violations.

His own career dotted with injuries, interim head coach Paul Nelsen understands and respects Karaica's will to succeed against all obstacles. Together, they've trimmed back her workouts with long-range goals in mind.

Instead of working out twice a day, she'll often go only once. When she does double up, her yardage is trimmed in half.

"She knows she may not be at her best at conference or NCAAs, but she has come back. And not a lot of people do come back," Nelsen said. "And those that don't come back, that's always a part of them."

ALL SPORTS



"She knows how to get back up and what it takes to do that. That behavior will go with her for the rest of her life."

That makes Karaica a perfect leader for Nebraska in what amounts to a transitional season. As the only senior on the women's team, she's helping to mold the young talented swimmers who already have had to adjust to a coaching change and a tough schedule that included the likes of two-time defending national champion Georgia.

The Huskers, however, have had their share of victories. NU beat then-ranked Texas A&M on the road, raising hopes for a second-place finish at the Big 12 Championships in February. Small in numbers, Nebraska's women still finished a respectable 7-4 in dual meets.

Karaica takes pride in that. With so many of her own questions unanswered, she found the time to answer those of her teammates.

"She has that weight on her shoulders and the weight of being sick like she has been," Nelsen said. "I really admire how she's handled that." ■

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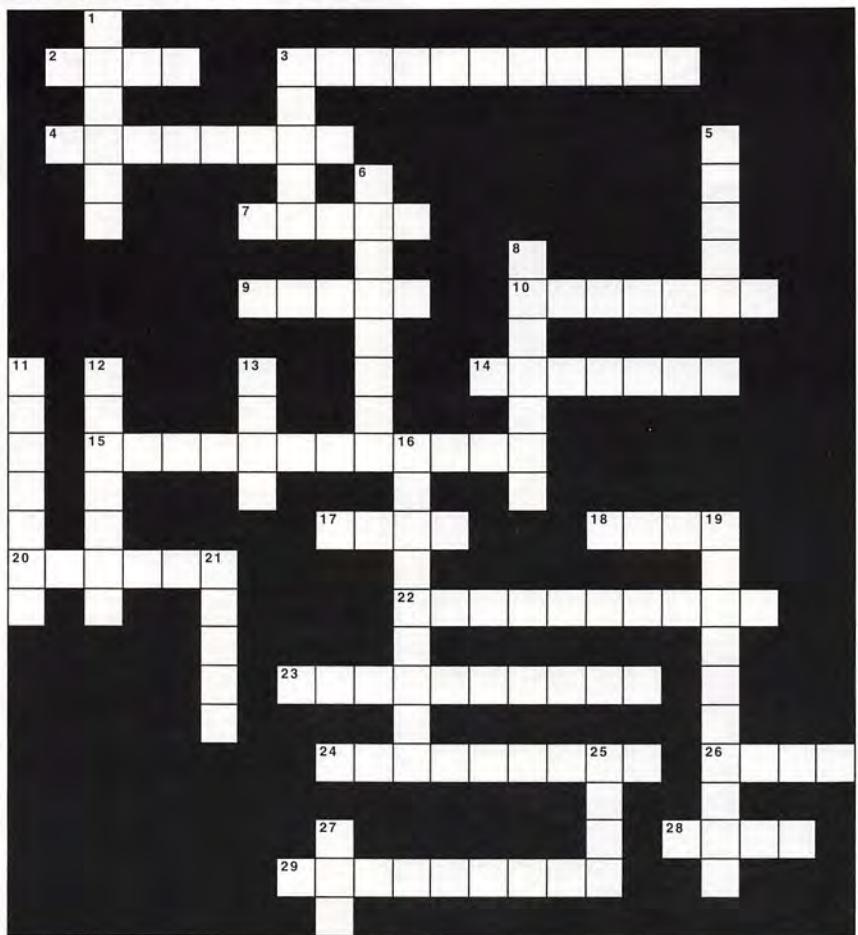
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Answers in April issue



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Coming Attractions

Screening provides early glimpse of newest Nebraska recruits



**Mike
BABCOCK**

THE VIDEO wasn't digital quality. Far from it. And there was no surround sound. In fact, there was no sound at all, and Nebraska graduate assistant Tim Albin declined to provide narrative.

"You can refer to your packets," he said with a laugh.

Albin drew the assignment of running the projector for a screening of video clips of the Cornhuskers' 2001 football recruits on letter-of-intent-signing day. As always, the screening was held for reporters in the second-floor auditorium at the South Stadium, following a recruiting news conference.

As always, there were clips, in varying degrees of quality, of each of Nebraska's recruits.

And as always, you came away from the screening wondering exactly how the Cornhusker coaches were able to evaluate some of the recruits, given the clarity of the footage.

Occasionally, the action was all a blur, shadows of light and dark.

But there was no problem picking out Philip Bland, a 6-foot, 205-pound rover from Fairview High in Lafayette, Colo. He was the one putting the big hits on ball carriers, evidence of why Coach Frank Solich said earlier, "Philip Bland is the type of player that reminds you of a Mike Brown."

It should be noted that Solich didn't say Bland would be the next Mike Brown, just that his play is reminiscent of that of one of the best defensive backs in Cornhusker history.

Solich wouldn't intentionally place such a burden on Bland's shoulders, any more than he meant to suggest a direct comparison between Robin Miller and Mike Rozier, when he used Miller's name in the same sentence with Rozier's on letter-of-intent-signing day two years ago.

Miller is still trying to establish himself as an offensive back.

Bland "is extremely aggressive, a great tackler, and yet is able to play pass defense very well. He is a very instinctive player," Solich said. And the video clips seemed to indicate as much.

There also was no problem picking out Seppo Evaray, a 6-foot-5, 325-pound defensive lineman from Finland by way of Laurel, Neb. He could be easily identified, even without depending on a jersey number or the John Madden-type white circles on the clips highlighting individual players.

Evaray, the biggest of Nebraska's recruits, was a monster compared to those around him.

Because he played only one year of club football in Finland before coming to the United States as an exchange student in 1999, Evaray will be something of a development project. "But Seppo is not a baby," said Solich. "He is built very well. Seppo is tremendously quick off the ball."

"We expect that he will develop into a great player here."

Solich has more to go on than just video, of course. Evaray is one of nine members of this recruiting class to have attended the Big Red Football School. "You see them first-hand as you coach them, without question you're going to have a better feel for a young man," Solich said.

The name is pronounced "SEP-oh Ev-var-AYE-yea" according to information distributed on the recruits at the news conference. Solich pronounced it and added with a smile, "I'm hoping."

The information packet to which Albin referred included three other pronunciations. Danial Manning's first name is pronounced "Dan-YELL." Le Kevin Smith's first name, two words, is pronounced "Leh-KEE-vin. And Marques Simmons' first name is pronounced "MAR-cus."

Manning is a cornerback from Corsicana, Texas — the Cornhuskers' only Texas recruit this season after they got four a year ago. Smith is a defensive lineman from Macon, Ga.

Smith and twins Daniel and Josh Bullocks from Chattanooga, Tenn., are evidence that Nebraska can still attract, on occasion, outstanding athletes from the southern United States.

The Bullocks brothers can be more easily identified on videotape than in person because of their jersey numbers. When they visited Nebraska, "they had the coaches guessing a little bit as to who was who, to be honest with you," Solich said. "It wasn't until I made the home visit that the high school coach gave me a means of looking at them and being able to separate them.

"And then you wait about five seconds before you say their first names."

Simmons, one of two running backs in the recruiting class, provided plenty of highlights for the videotape. He rushed for 1,788 yards and touchdowns as a senior at North High in Davenport. What makes his statistics even more remarkable is the fact that North went 0-9.

Simmons wore a No. 33 jersey, bringing to mind former Cornhusker and NFL running back Roger Craig, who also came from Davenport (Central High) and wore a No. 33 jersey.

That's coincidence not design, however. Appearance to the contrary, Craig wasn't involved in Simmons' decision to sign a letter of intent with Nebraska.

"I met Roger Craig many years ago at an NFL game in Minnesota, but I had no contact with him during my recruiting process," Simmons told the Quad-City Times.

"I'm not trying to be Roger Craig; I just have to be Marques Simmons."

Measuring Simmons against Craig is as unfair as expecting Bland to be the next Brown. But that's how most of us respond to recruits. We try to evaluate the unknown based on the known. The proper way, however, is to wait and see. And that might take a year or two, or even three. ■

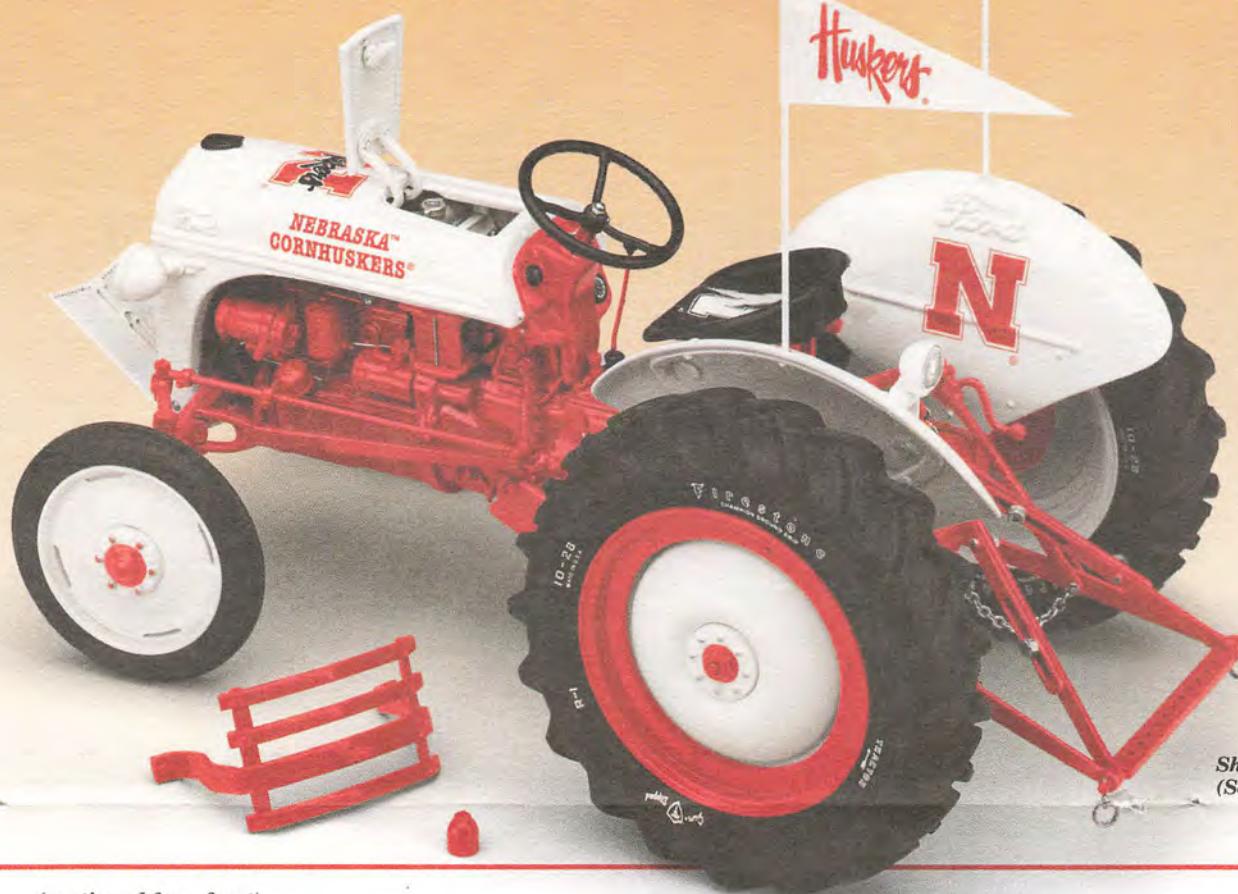


Philip Bland is a hard-hitting rover from Lafayette, Colo.

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Touchdowns as a senior at North High in Davenport. What makes his statistics even more remarkable is the fact that North went 0-9.

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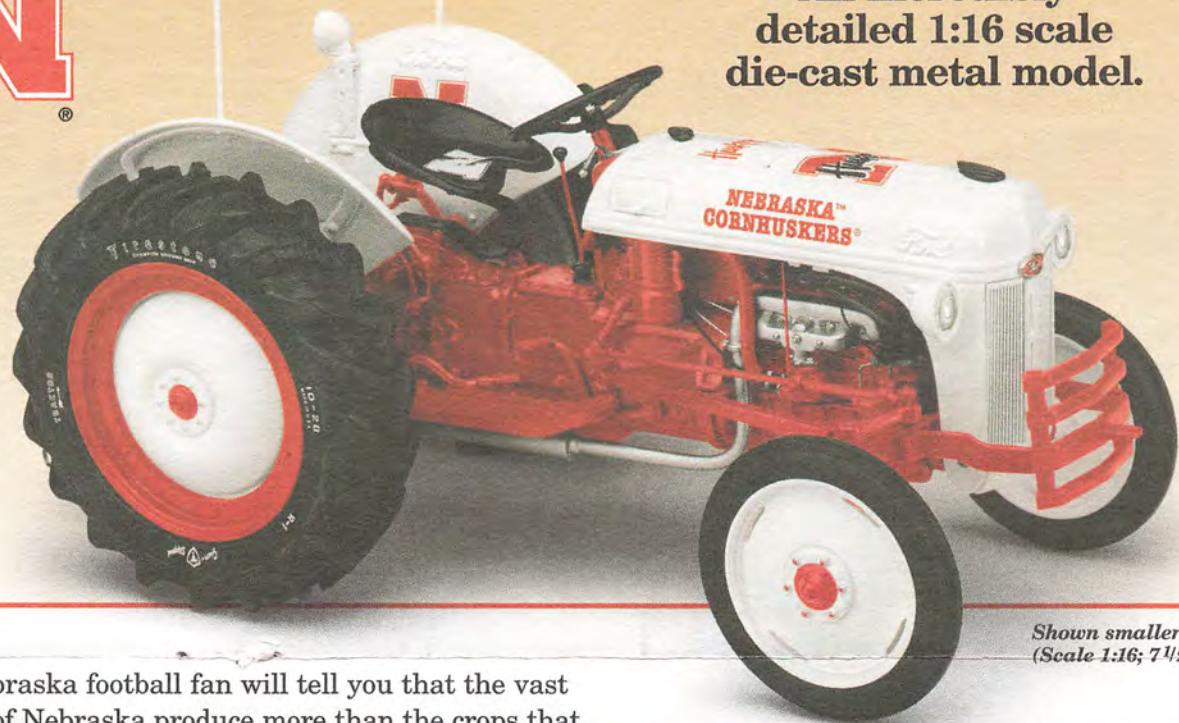
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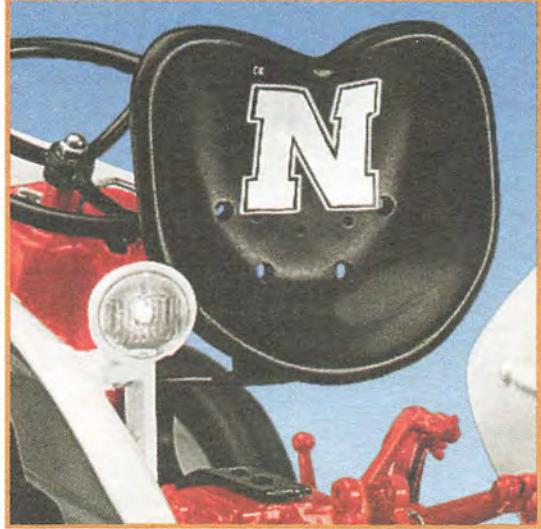
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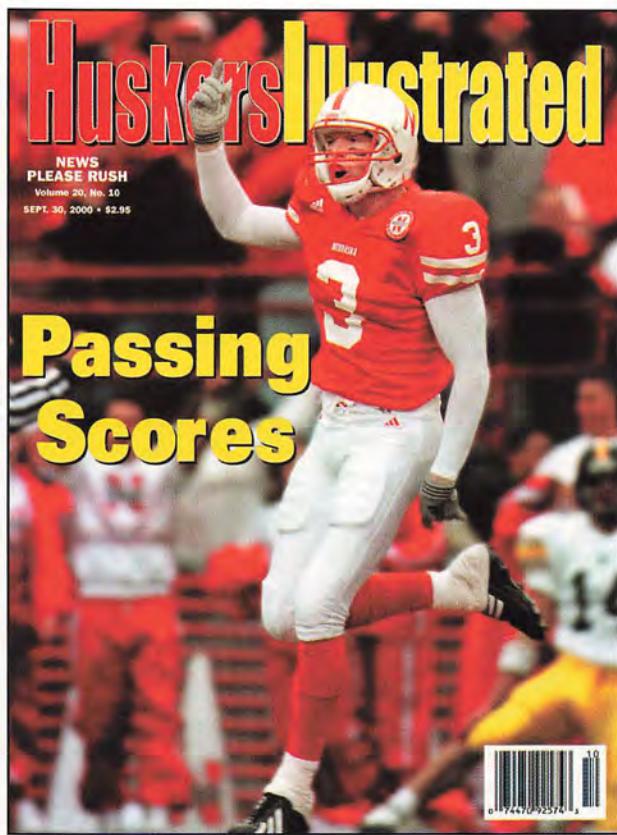
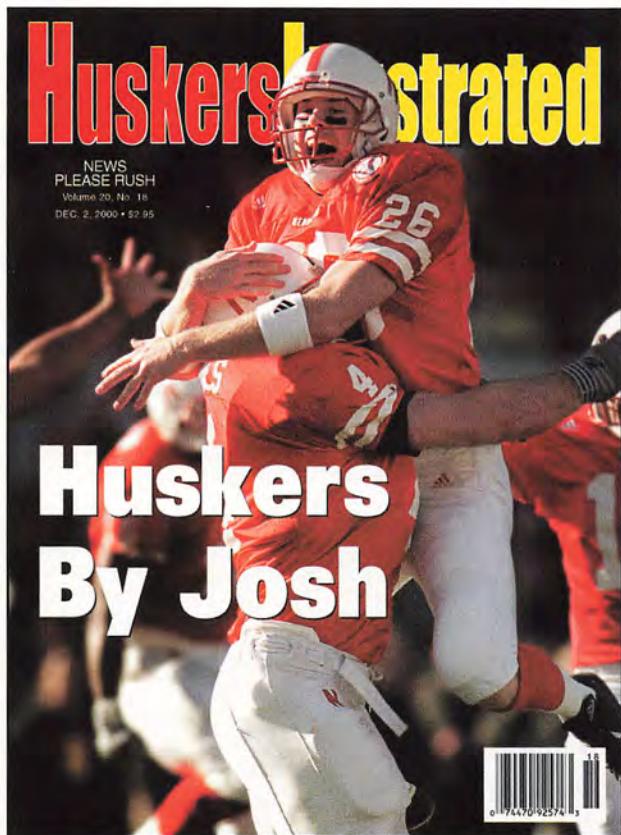
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